

BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY AND THE HOARE-LAVAL PLAN:

A CRITIQUE OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE

OF CRISIS DECISION-MAKING

by

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## A B S T R A C T

### British Foreign Policy and the Hoare-Laval Plan: A Critique of the Theory and Practice of Crisis Decision-Making

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This thesis investigates the relationship between international crises and the process of foreign policy decision-making. It synthesizes from the existing literature a theory of crisis decision-making and then tests that theory against the detailed evidence of a case study. The thesis is divided into three major parts. The first establishes the theory and then uses it deductively to derive a number of empirically testable propositions relating crisis as the independent variable to various aspects of the decision-making process as dependent ones. The propositions add the crucial operational element to the theory: they provide the sole means of testing it against the evidence. The second part of the thesis consists of the case study: an account of British decision-making during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict of 1935, including its climax that December during the twelve days of the Hoare-Laval crisis. This case study meets the two essential requirements for testing propositions and theory. First, it includes both crisis and non-crisis situations, thereby enabling one to compare crisis and non-crisis decision-making processes. Second, it provides an example in which very great similarities existed between the crisis and non-crisis situations. Consequently, one can isolate and take into account those factors, other than the distinction between crisis and non-crisis, which might have influenced the decision-making process and produced differences in behaviour. Finally, in the third part of the thesis, the propositions are tested against the evidence provided by the case study. These raw findings are then analyzed in order to ascertain whether it is the crisis/non-crisis distinction or some other factor which best explains differences between crisis and non-crisis decision-making processes. Because of the deductive connection between propositions and theory, the results of this analysis can be used to evaluate the validity of the theory itself. The ultimate conclusion reached is that it is very doubtful whether any theory of crisis decision-making is, even in principle, possible.

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The real death of the League was in December 1935, not in 1939 or 1945. One day it was a powerful body imposing sanctions, seemingly more effective than ever before; the next day it was an empty sham, everyone scuttling from it as quickly as possible. What killed the League was the publication of the Hoare-Laval Plan.

- A.J.P. Taylor,  
The Origins of the Second World War

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.

- Karl Marx,  
The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis  
Napoleon

## INTRODUCTION

International crisis. The very expression evokes drama and excitement. It conjures up images of gunboats showing the flag by distant shores, of armies marching off to war, of foreign offices beset by tension and turmoil, and of momentous decisions taken in high places.

Certainly, those problems commonly referred to as international crises appear to produce important consequences for the conduct of foreign policy. In the wake of the assassination at Sarajevo of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the crisis of July of 1914 led the great powers of Europe to begin a war which resulted in millions of deaths and irrevocably altered the shape of the modern world. In 1962, the Cuban missile crisis pushed the government of the United States into taking foreign policy actions which, though courageous and ultimately successful, produced a confrontation with the Soviet Union that brought the world to the brink of nuclear destruction. As a result of the international monetary crisis of 1971, the majority of the rich trading nations of the West revised their foreign economic policies and reversed their attitudes towards the hallowed principle of fixed exchange rates enshrined in the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944. Finally, the oil crisis following the Yom Kippur war of 1973, when the Arab oil-producing states raised both the price of petroleum

products and the spectre of an embargo, caused Japan and most of the countries of Western Europe to quickly adopt foreign policies much more pro-Arab than those previously espoused.

Despite the apparent significance of this relationship between international crises and foreign policy behaviour, the causal link connecting the two is not direct. It is mediated by the decision-making process. Nominally, the 'state' is the actor in foreign policy. That term, however, is an abstraction, useful for international law and extremely convenient as a short-hand reference. But the real actors in foreign policy are the individuals within the government of the state.<sup>1</sup> When confronted with a crisis, it is they who gather and interpret information about it, identify the goals relevant for dealing with it, and combine the two to produce those decisions which actually lead to action. It is this decision-making process, conducted by individual decision-makers, which provides the connecting link between the emergence of a crisis and subsequent foreign policy behaviour.

The general subject matter of this thesis consists of the relationship between international crises and this process of decision-making. An international crisis can, for the time being, be simply defined as a specific type of problem affecting the external relations of a state (a more precise definition will follow in the next chapter). The decision-making process is the consequent means by which the decision-makers, severally and together, formulate that policy or policies intended to deal with the crisis. A considerable amount of work has been devoted to the formulation of valid generalizations on the link between the two. As must be obvious, however, no two crises are identical. Each involves unique characteristics, different individuals, and a variety of issues. Hence, any attempt at generalization must rest not upon the substance of



crises, which will vary greatly, but upon the identification of certain generic properties common to all crises. These we can call the structural, as opposed to the substantive, characteristics of a crisis. They are independent of its specific subject matter. It is these structural identities which provide the basis for making systematic comparisons among crises and allow the investigation of their influence as a class of phenomena.

The existence of such common characteristics permits the construction of a general theory of crisis decision-making. Any such theory must consist of three basic elements. First, it must provide an account of how the decision-making process works. Second, it must define international crises in terms of their common generic - or structural - characteristics. Third, it must establish the theoretical connection between crises, so defined, and the decision-making process in order to demonstrate that the characteristics of the former will indeed influence the conduct of the latter.

From a theory of this type, it becomes possible to deduce empirical propositions relating crisis as the independent variable to various aspects of the decision-making process as dependent ones. Such propositions add the operational element to any theory: not only do they provide the sole means of testing a theory of crisis decision-making against historical evidence, but also they indicate what will likely happen in future crises and consequently serve both as a predictive tool and as a set of guidelines for improving the quality of decision-making. For both of these reasons, empirical propositions are absolutely indispensable: useful, if valid, to analysts and statesmen alike.

Previous studies of crisis decision-making have identified a large number of such propositions. Both the subject matters and the methods of these investigations have varied considerably. They have ranged from



detailed reconstructions of historical examples, to simulations of real and imaginary crises, to interviews with decision-makers, to content analyses of diplomatic communications, to primarily conceptual work designed to clarify ideas and suggest fruitful lines for further inquiry. Despite the disparities of approach of these efforts, most of them share the common goal of devising and/or testing propositions linking crises and the decision-making process. For example, with respect to American decision-making following the North Korean invasion of the South in 1950, Glenn Paige hypothesized that 'crisis decisions tend to be reached by ad hoc decisional units'.<sup>2</sup> Charles Hermann used the technique of simulation to examine the conjecture that 'in crisis as compared to non-crisis, the number of alternative solutions to the situation identified by the decision-makers is decreased'.<sup>3</sup> In an investigation of the attitudes of officials in the United States Department of State, Howard Lentner found that 'crises raise tensions among the policy makers involved and heighten the stress and anxiety they experience'.<sup>4</sup> And Michael Brecher, in his study of several Israeli foreign policy decisions, tested the assertion that 'in a crisis as opposed to a non-crisis situation, decision-making becomes increasingly centralized'.<sup>5</sup>

Existing propositions, however, suffer from one very serious flaw. This is, as James Robinson has pointed out, 'the lack of a rich deductive theory involving crisis'.<sup>6</sup> The numerous propositions in the literature tend to be ad hoc: plausible, inferred from empirical evidence, but not following logically from any coherent body of theory. Testing them does not at the same time test any theory of crisis decision-making. Therefore, due to this lack of proven theoretical validity, the propositions cannot be applied with any confidence to future crises. The problem lies in a failure of synthesis. All the necessary elements already exist:

theories of decision-making, conceptions of crisis, and the propositions themselves. But these have not been combined to provide the propositions with an explicit deductive foundation.

Furthermore, neither propositions nor theory has been adequately tested against truly satisfactory evidence. For this to be done, two conditions must be met. First, the historical material must consist of both crisis and non-crisis situations. Only if significant differences exist between the decision-making processes within these two types of situations can one assume that crises may affect the decision-making process. Second, to be certain that crises actually do affect this process, there must also exist a great deal of substantive continuity between the two situations. The crisis/non-crisis distinction is not the only factor that will influence the nature of the decision-making process. The fewer the differences that exist in other possible factors, the easier it becomes to discount their likely effects and the greater the confidence one can place in the results of testing the propositions. Thus, historical evidence with significant substantive continuity between crisis and non-crisis situations is necessary for determining whether or not any theory of crisis decision-making is valid. To my knowledge, no case study has properly met these two requirements.

Consequently, the purposes of this thesis are twofold:

1. drawing primarily on the existing literature, to synthesize the various elements into a theory of crisis decision-making from which empirical propositions can be deductively derived, and
2. to test these propositions, and thus the theory itself, against the historical evidence of a case study that includes both crisis and non-crisis situations between which only minimal substantive differences exist.



The actual case study to be used consists of the decision-making process as conducted by the British Government before and during the Hoare-Laval crisis of 1935. In the summer of that year, the British Government faced the strong likelihood of a war in East Africa between Italy and Ethiopia. On 3 October, this possibility became a reality when Mussolini's legions invaded Haile Selassie's ancient empire. Both the threat of war and war itself confronted the British decision-makers with an acute dilemma. Conflicting pressures pushed them simultaneously in two incompatible directions. On the one hand, they felt obligated to oppose Italy and support Ethiopia and the League of Nations; on the other hand, they wished to preserve the Stresa Front, the Anglo-French-Italian alliance against Germany. Instead of choosing between these two options, they attempted to preserve both, precariously balancing one against the other. By the end of November of 1935, matters came to a head. In Geneva, the members of the League were about to embargo the shipment of all oil and petroleum products to Italy. The potentially decisive nature of this measure - combined with Mussolini's threat to attack the British Mediterranean fleet if it was implemented - made further prevarication difficult for the British Government: they faced the imminent possibility of finding themselves in a situation where they would have to abandon their dual policy and choose one option or the other. As a result, at the beginning of December of 1935, Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Foreign Secretary, journeyed to Paris to meet with M. Pierre Laval, the French Premier and Foreign Minister. Their object was to reach an immediate, peaceful solution to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, and they quickly drafted and initialled a set of peace proposals known as the Hoare-Laval Plan. The British Foreign Secretary intended this to serve as a means of ending the fighting in East Africa between Italy and Ethiopia and thereby forestalling the implementation

of the oil embargo. In this fashion, Sir Samuel Hoare hoped to solve the British dilemma and save both the League and Stresa. Instead, the Hoare-Laval Plan precipitated a major international crisis.

The Hoare-Laval crisis was decisive for the outcome of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict and crucial for the future of international politics. It guaranteed the success of the Italian conquest. It destroyed the League of Nations. It shattered the Stresa Front and drove Italy into the arms of Germany. Arguably, it marked the turning-point of international relations during the nineteen thirties and foreshadowed all the issues and problems which were to plague British decision-makers right up to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Six reasons underlie the choice of this particular example as the case study:

1. The Hoare-Laval crisis was an historically decisive episode yet has not received the careful attention it deserves.
2. It provides a particularly rich, complex, and unusual instance of decision-making against which to test the propositions. Not only did international, domestic, organizational, and personal factors all affect the behaviour of the British decision-makers; but also their actions, as we shall see, presented the rare spectacle of a major decision made and then quickly reversed.
3. While most of the work on crisis has concentrated on the United States, this study focuses on Britain. It should help to isolate certain influences of crises on the decision-making process which have been proposed as having general validity but which might in fact stem from peculiarly American circumstances.
4. Ample historical material exists and is available for the purpose of describing in detail the actual process of decision-making within the British Government. The Cabinet, Foreign Office, and



Committee of Imperial Defence documents lie readily to hand at the Public Record Office in London and provide the essential primary sources. Enough biographies and memoirs have appeared that the beliefs and motivations of the individual decision-makers may be fairly reliably judged. The general background and overall course of events can be found in Hansard, in the press, in contemporary writings, and in the numerous historical works covering the inter-war period.

5. The case study encompasses both crisis and non-crisis decision-making. As Glenn Paige has recently written, it is an essential task for the future 'to reconstruct "normal" decisions and to compare them with crisis decisions.... a much better understanding of crisis decisions and of foreign policy decision-making in general will be achieved when the behaviour of decision-makers can be viewed in the context of normal activities'.<sup>7</sup> Previous empirical studies have tended to neglect such specific comparisons. Yet, they are absolutely essential for satisfactorily testing the empirical propositions and thus either falsifying or lending support to any theory of crisis decision-making. Indeed, as the very possibility of a distinct theory of crisis decision-making hinges upon the existence of considerable variations between crisis and non-crisis decision-making processes, the assumption that the two differ significantly merits critical investigation. This is facilitated by the nature of the case study.

6. Finally - and most importantly - the Hoare-Laval crisis was substantively a continuation of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. The decision-makers in the British Government, the general circumstances in which they had to function, and the specific issues with which they had to deal were very similar during the two crucial



periods covered by the case study: the non-crisis situation from the Italian invasion of Ethiopia up to Sir Samuel Hoare's trip to Paris and his initialling of the Hoare-Laval Plan, and the crisis situation of the following few days which decided the fates of Ethiopia, the League of Nations, and the Stresa Front. Such great substantive continuity means that one can identify and take into account those factors, other than the distinction between crisis and non-crisis, which might have influenced the process of decision-making and produced differences in behaviour. It is this substantive continuity that enables the propositions and the theory to be fairly rigorously and confidently tested and that consequently makes this example a particularly apt one for the purposes of this work.

Given the two purposes of this thesis, it divides logically into three sections. The first synthesizes a theory of crisis decision-making and then uses that theory to derive a number of empirically testable propositions and to help provide an analytical framework for conducting the case study. The second section presents the case study itself: a detailed narrative describing the decision-making process within the British Government prior to and during the Hoare-Laval crisis. The final section tests the propositions against this body of historical evidence; the results will indicate how valid the propositions and thus the theory of crisis decision-making itself are. Whatever the specific findings, the aim of this thesis is to make a further contribution to the understanding and explanation of the influence of international crises upon the process of foreign policy decision-making.

### Notes to the Introduction

1. The explanation of foreign policy can rest on different units and levels of analysis. For discussions of this problem, see Kenneth Waltz, Man, the State and War; J.D. Singer, 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations'; and Arnold Wolfers, 'The Actors in International Politics'. For the similar but more fundamental problem of whether men mould the course of history or are prisoners of fate entwined in the mesh of great historical forces, see Sidney Hook, The Hero in History; Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace; and Sir Isaiah Berlin's brilliant commentary on Tolstoy, The Hedgehog and the Fox. (Full references to all works mentioned in the notes may be found in the Bibliography.)
2. Glenn Paige, The Korean Decision, p. 281.
3. Charles Hermann, Crises in Foreign Policy, p. 161.
4. Howard Lentner, 'The Concept of Crisis as Viewed by the United States Department of State', p. 133.
5. Michael Brecher, Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy, p. 565.
6. James Robinson, 'Crisis Decision-Making: An Inventory and Appraisal of Concepts, Theories, Hypotheses and Techniques of Analysis', p. 122.
7. Glenn Paige, 'Comparative Case Analysis of Crisis Decisions: Korea and Cuba', p. 54.

PART I

THEORY

## Chapter One

### Crisis Decision-Making:

### Theory, Propositions, and Framework



## I - A Theory of Crisis Decision-Making

A decision is 'an explicit act of choice' taken in response to a problem.<sup>1</sup> The specific nature of foreign policy decisions can reflect a myriad of influences. In general, however, two broad classes of factors combine to produce any decision: information and goals. The information available to the decision-makers provides them with a basis for understanding their present situation, formulating their alternative courses of action, and predicting the probable consequences of each. The goals held by the decision-makers provide them with a basis for determining what future state of affairs they would most prefer. With respect to any given problem, the combination of these two factors results in a specific choice of policy. This selection and combination of information and goals constitutes the decision-making process.

### The Decision-Making System

The conduct of this decision-making process takes place within the government<sup>2</sup> of the state: within what can be formally called the decision-making system. This has two elements. On the one hand, there are the decision-makers themselves: those individuals who hold official roles in the government.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, it is their perceptions, their



goals, and their decisions which determine the nature of foreign policy. On the other hand, the decision-makers do not act alone or as private citizens. Not only do they hold official positions in government - and consequently derive some of their goals and beliefs from their offices - but also their various roles are connected by a hierarchy of authority and by formal and customary patterns of communication and interaction, all of which can also influence the making of foreign policy. The decision-making system has both an organizational and an individual component. In practice, the entire government does not participate in determining foreign policy, and those elements of it that do will vary from one issue to the next. However, the decision-making system as a whole defines the universe of potential decision-makers and the totality of the organizational structure which joins them together and within which they function.<sup>4</sup>

### The Environment

The concerns of the decision-making system are both foreign and domestic. It exists and functions within an external environment and an internal environment.<sup>5</sup> The former consists of everything beyond the territorial boundaries of the state: the physical world, the international system, and the foreign policies and domestic natures of other states. The latter consists of everything within the state except the decision-making system itself: the physical characteristics of the state, its political and economic structures and processes, and its society and culture.<sup>6</sup> While by definition foreign policy is concerned with the external environment, the internal environment can exert an equally important influence.<sup>7</sup> It, too, may function as the source of problems and the focus towards which action is directed. Both aspects of the environment provide a wide range of influences over foreign policy: from

each come information on which to base behaviour and constraints which limit the freedom of that behaviour, and with respect to each the decision-makers hold various goals and values.<sup>8</sup> In general, the environment as a whole forms 'a set of potentially relevant factors and conditions which may affect the action of any state'.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, both aspects of the environment have a psychological and an operational component.<sup>10</sup> The former refers to the environment as the decision-maker views it. His behaviour rests upon his perceptions and interpretations and not upon some absolute, objective reality:

'what matters in policy-making is how the milieu appears to the policy-maker, not how it appears to some sideline analyst or how it might appear to a hypothetical omniscient observer'.<sup>11</sup> The latter, the operational environment, refers to the setting in which decisions are executed and actions produce consequences. Decision-makers act on the basis of their psychological environments, but it is the discrepancy between these and their operational environments that places them in constant uncertainty about their present situation and the future consequences of their actions. To understand how and why the environment influences foreign policy, it is necessary to take into account both its psychological and its operational aspects.

### The Occasion for Decision

The environment functions as the source of input into the decision-making system and as the focus of output from that system. But it is within the decision-making system itself that the actual process of decision-making takes place. In one sense, this process is continuous. The government must constantly contend with issues requiring decisions and actions. For any particular issue, however, what begins the process is an occasion for decision. This is the recognition somewhere within



the decision-making system of a problem that cannot be ignored and must be dealt with. The decision-making process then commences with respect to that problem.

### The Decision Situation

The occasion for decision also fulfils a second function. It provides the starting-point of the decision situation. A situation consists of 'the boundaries, the stops and starts, that humans impose on continuous reality'.<sup>12</sup> Any decision situation is bounded in two ways. On the one hand, it has a beginning and an ending; on the other hand, through the decision-making process itself, the decision-makers impose limits of relevance on it: they define the nature of the situation and focus their attention on what they consider to be important for dealing with the problem that started it. Upon the recognition of an occasion for decision, 'some aspect of the situation is no longer taken for granted; it becomes problematical in the decision-makers' frame of reference'.<sup>13</sup> The situation must be redefined. Consequently, the occasion for decision - as well as initiating the decision-making process - provides the beginning of a new decision situation.

### The Decision-Making Process

In broad terms, the decision-making process has already been defined as the selection and combination of information and goals. It provides the connecting link between the recognition of a problem (an occasion for decision) and the policy decisions eventually made by the decision-makers on how to deal with that problem. More specifically, the decision-making process can be conceived as consisting of four operations: the definition of the situation, the formulation of alternatives, the choice of alternatives, and the consideration of feedback.<sup>14</sup> While in practice

these operations will tend to overlap somewhat, nevertheless they are analytically distinct and can be treated as such.

a) the definition of the situation

In response to an occasion for decision, the initial step undertaken by the decision-makers consists of their defining the decision situation. They place boundaries upon what they consider is salient to the problem. They search for information about it and interpret that information in such a fashion as to produce for themselves a coherent picture of reality. At the same time, they attempt to identify those goals that are relevant to the occasion for decision and which will serve to guide their behaviour.

b) the formulation of alternatives

Having recognized a problem and defined for themselves the situation produced by it, the decision-makers then formulate the alternatives available to them. On the basis of the picture of reality they have created (their psychological environment), they look for possible courses of action.

c) the choice of alternatives

The third analytical operation of the decision-making process is the choice of alternatives. From the universe of possible options they have found, the decision-makers choose that alternative (including the option of doing nothing<sup>15</sup>) which they feel will best achieve the goal or goals which they deem most important.



d) the consideration of feedback

The fourth operation is the consideration of feedback. In a complex decision situation, initial decisions will either prove not to solve the problem or will be designed as tentative, not intended to do so. The three operations of definition, formulation, and choice are likely to be repeated over more than one decision stage. In response to the implementation of a decision, the decision-makers will receive some response from the environment about their actions. Because the discrepancy between psychological and operational environments will probably lead to unintended or unforeseen consequences, the next decision stage will likely proceed on a somewhat different basis. As a result of this feedback, decision-makers might alter their conception of and approach to the original problem. They may redefine the situation, reformulate alternatives, and perhaps choose a very different course of action.<sup>16</sup>

Problems Complicating the Analytical Operations

Complicating these analytical operations of decision-making are three major problems.<sup>17</sup> First, because the environment is complex, individuals must act under conditions of uncertainty. No decision-maker can be confident about the completeness or correctness of his information, nor can he accurately foresee all the possible consequences of his decisions. Second, each decision-maker will likely hold multiple goals. His personality and his several roles in society and government will lead him to hold a number of goals not all of which will necessarily be compatible. With respect to a given problem, various goals will suggest different and conflicting choices and provide competing guidelines for behaviour. Third, the power of decision is dispersed within the decision-making system. Because many individuals participate in the



decision-making process, conflicts will exist among them. Definitions of the situation, suggested alternatives, preferred choices, and even evaluations of feedback will vary, differing from one individual to the next and thereby complicating matters considerably.

To explain fully the four analytical operations of decision-making, any theory has to be able to account for how they work under conditions of uncertainty, multiple goals, and dispersion of the power of decision. The answer lies in the combination of a) the psychological or cognitive processes carried on within the minds of individual decision-makers, and b) the bureaucratic or organizational processes carried on among decision-makers within the decision-making system as a whole. As Steinbruner points out, 'it is cognitive operations of the human mind working in interaction with the organizational structure of the government which set workable limits on highly diffuse decision problems'.<sup>18</sup>

### Cognitive Decision-Making

Cognitive aspects of decision-making explain how the individual compensates for uncertainty and multiple goals.<sup>19</sup> With respect to the former, the decision-maker cannot always afford to wait upon events to clarify matters for him. As has been noted with respect to economic decision-making:

Everything that happens, happens in a short-period situation, under the influence of current conditions and expectations about the future. Today is a moment in historical time, between an irrecoverable past and an uncertain future. Decisions must be taken today, things must be done, it is not possible to wait for certainty.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, it is not possible to avoid action because of value conflicts. Even if a decision entails high costs in terms of sacrificed goals, it must still be made. It is, of course, possible that 'the decision-maker will accept the necessity to choose among the conflicting values and

interests engaged by the policy problem and attempt to live with the unpleasant consequences stoically and philosophically'.<sup>21</sup> However, when the psychological stress and tension of having to sacrifice a highly cherished goal become too great, the decision-maker will attempt cognitively to alleviate this stress.

If the decision-maker possessed perfect information and a coherent utility function in which his goals were hierarchically and unambiguously ordered, then his response to a problem - assuming he acted rationally - would be simply to follow that course of action which maximized his highest ranked goal. Such a situation, however, does not exist. Thus, to handle uncertainty and multiple goals, the decision-maker must rely on one or more of all of the following cognitive techniques:

1. He can narrow his focus of attention with respect to both time and space. He can minimize complexity and avoid the problem of competing goals by restricting that area which he defines as being relevant to the occasion for decision. On the one hand, he does this by limiting those aspects of the environment to which he pays attention; on the other hand, by concentrating on the present and the immediate future and discounting the long run.
2. The decision-maker can compensate for uncertainty and complexity by relying upon prior experience, historical parallels, and his theories of how the world works. In this vein, Robert Jervis has stated that:

The evidence from both psychology and history overwhelmingly supports the view... that decision-makers tend to fit incoming information into their existing theories and images. Indeed, their theories and images play a large part in what they notice. In other words, actors tend to perceive what they expect. Furthermore... a theory will have greater impact upon an actor's interpretation of data (a) the greater the ambiguity of the data and (b) the higher the degree of confidence with which the actor holds the theory.<sup>22</sup>



Furthermore, the decision-maker will not only interpret his environment in terms of his beliefs and his experience, but he can also interpret it in such a fashion as to reconcile conflicting goals. He can reduce stress and facilitate the making of a decision by (mis)perceiving incoming data so as to remove incompatibilities among his various goals and thereby give himself unambiguous guidelines for behaviour.

3. The decision-maker can alter the salience of one or more of his goals. By defining away conflicts among goals, he provides himself with a clear criterion for choice and thereby reduces the stress he feels.
4. The decision-maker can, when unable to reconcile or define away conflicting goals, attempt to find an alternative which satisfies all of them. He reduces stress by trying to keep his options open and 'hedging his bets'.
5. Finally, all of the above may prove unsatisfactory for enabling the decision-maker to cope with uncertainty and conflicting goals. In such circumstances, he can, of course, flip a coin, pass the responsibility on to someone else, or, like Stalin upon the German invasion of Russia, withdraw into seclusion. However, it is also likely, when he must act, that he will resort to emotional responses - 'gut reactions'.

#### Conditions Enhancing the Importance of Cognitive Decision-Making

The influence that cognitive processes have upon the analytical operations of decision-making will vary among decision situations. To a large extent this influence depends upon the personality of the individual decision-maker and his tolerance for the stress induced by uncertainty and multiple goals.<sup>23</sup> However, any given decision-maker

is likely to depend most heavily upon cognitive decision-making in the following combination of circumstances:

1. the more he feels that the occasion for decision is characterized by complexity and uncertainty;
2. when he perceives the occasion for decision as involving multiple goals, and the greater he feels the cost of action to be in terms of goals sacrificed;
3. the more he believes that the time available for response before events foreclose his options is both short and too insufficient for him to resolve uncertainty, unravel complexity, and decide among conflicting goals by intensively examining the environment; and
4. the more he feels that, despite these difficulties, he must take some action rather than merely wait to see what develops.

Under this combination of circumstances, when uncertainty and stress are high, time is short and inadequate, and action is felt to be both essential and potentially costly, the cognitive processes of the individual will have their greatest influence upon the four analytical operations of decision-making.

### Organizational Decision-Making

Further complicating these four analytical operations is the fact that the power of decision is dispersed within the government. A large number of decision-makers are involved in the making of foreign policy. Each will perceive and interpret information in a unique fashion; each will hold goals and values distinct from and often conflicting with those of the others; and consequently each will come to prefer different policies for dealing with any problem. Despite these differences, decisions will be made and actions will be taken. The problems inherent in this dispersion of power will be dealt with through organizational processes. Specifically, complex organizations handle the dispersion of decision-making power in four distinct fashions: through departmental



autonomy and bureaucratic politics, through group decision-making, through a hierarchical structure of authority, and through routine procedures.<sup>24</sup> The organizational processes of decision-making, like the cognitive ones, are likely to influence the definition of the situation, the formulation of alternatives, the choice of alternatives, and the consideration of feedback.

a) departmental autonomy and bureaucratic politics

Any complex organization will have to cope with vast amounts of information and a wide range of tasks and responsibilities. The inevitable result is organizational fragmentation: the government will be divided into several departments, each with its own various sub-sections, all of which are charged with performing specified and specialized functions. Because each department of government has its own particular area of concern, each one not only will pay attention to different channels and types of information but also will place different interpretations upon the same information. Similarly, each department will hold its own particular goals and values with respect to the environment. As a result, if any given occasion for decision presents a problem that involves more than one government department, each will have its own definition of the situation, its distinctive alternatives, its preferred choices, and its own evaluation of feedback. If government departments simply follow their own preferences without any co-ordination or central direction, the result is departmental autonomy: instead of a state's having one coherent foreign policy, it has several strands of policy, some complementary, some conflicting, others unrelated. One step further comes competition among departments. They vie for power and prestige, for larger shares of the budget, and, in the process of decision-making, for the choice of their policies.

Thus, the dispersion of power within an organization can in part be handled by compartmentalization and competition: by departmental autonomy and bureaucratic politics.<sup>25</sup>

b) group decision-making

Because of complexity in the environment and the organizational fragmentation inherent in governments, no single individual possesses both the expertise and the authority, let alone the time, to deal with every problem and make every decision. Moreover, issues often cut across the functional divisions of government. The result is group decision-making. All governments are characterized by a large number of such groups. At the very highest level, there is the Cabinet or its equivalent, but even at much lower levels there exist interdepartmental committees and various other bodies of collective decision.

The first major influence of the group upon the decision-making process is through the nature of its membership. 'The significance of the nature of the decisional unit immediately becomes a focus of attention because of the fundamental assumption of decision-making analysis that decisions tend to vary with the composition of the decisional unit.'<sup>26</sup> As every decision group is composed of a unique set of individuals, different groups would likely reach different decisions and implement different policies. Furthermore, while many groups exist prior to the recognition of a given problem, it always remains a possibility that an occasion for decision will lead to the formation of an ad hoc group. Such groups are more likely to be task oriented than to be dominated by the parochial interests of their members; they are more likely to be based on expertise; and they may be stacked: engineered in advance to include or exclude specific individuals and thereby produce pre-determined results.



However, 'a group is not merely the sum of its members; therefore decisions emerging from a group context are likely to be different than what a simple aggregation of individual preferences and abilities might suggest'.<sup>27</sup> For example, in identical circumstances, a unit that resolves conflicts on the basis of unanimity will likely adopt a different policy from one in which the majority rules. In general, 'the dynamics of group interaction are likely to have a significant effect on both the decision-making processes [the authors are referring to what have been called here the analytical operations of decision-making] and the substance and quality of the policy output'.<sup>28</sup> The internal dynamic of any group has at least three major aspects. The first pertains to its frequency of interaction. While group decision-making is not the sole method for handling the dispersion of power within the organization, it is a potentially important one. The group provides the major forum for discussion and decision. The more often a group meets, and the more intense and prolonged the interactions of its members are, then the greater is the likelihood of centralized co-ordination of policy. The group will play a more important role in authorizing the separate policies of its members, resolving disputes among them, and generally functioning as a co-ordinating body. Moreover, and this is the second aspect of group dynamics, the group may initiate and formulate policy rather than merely approve or arbitrate. Particularly as the frequency of interaction of the group rises, it may create its own reality distinctive from the separate realities of its members.<sup>29</sup> The group can be more than a forum for reconciling differences. The definition of the situation, the formulation and choice of alternatives, and even the consideration and interpretation of feedback can emerge from group interactions. The group does not necessarily merely decide from among competing viewpoints; it can also create its own policy based on group

processes. The third aspect of group dynamics is group cohesion. Each group has its own internal goals and values - shared by all its members by virtue of their belonging to the group. These refer to its prestige, its power, and even its preservation - to its functioning and efficiency and not to any specific policy. As cohesion and group solidarity increase, then the greater is the possibility that these group goals and values will take on a superordinate role in the decision-making process and that decisions may be based upon them and not upon the particular goals evoked by any substantive issue or problem.

Thus, the dispersion of power can be handled by group decision-making. And both the composition of the group and its internal dynamic can influence the analytical operations of decision-making and the decisions actually made.

#### c) the hierarchical structure of authority

The third method evolved by organizations for handling the problems inherent in a dispersion of the power of decision is the creation of a hierarchical structure of authority. When a decision cannot be made at a particular level, it gets passed up the ladder - either to a superior individual or a higher-ranking group. Two general causes can produce this effect. On the one hand, uncertainty and complexity in the environment or the existence of multiple goals in a problem can lead decision-makers to feel that responsibility must be pushed upwards; for various reasons, they 'pass the buck'. On the other hand, conflicts of opinion among decision-makers can often only be settled by referring the matter up to a higher level. (For exactly the same reasons, a very similar phenomenon can occur within decision-making groups: in conditions of uncertainty and disagreement, members of the group will tend to turn to the group leader for guidance and arbitration.)<sup>30</sup> At higher levels of



responsibility, decision-makers are freer to take authoritative actions committing the state, are less bound by the dictates of organizational routine, and are less constrained by parochial departmental values. Consequently, the level of decision within the hierarchy will have an effect on the analytical operations of decision-making and on the actual decisions made.

#### d) routine procedures

Finally, a great deal of organizational decision-making proceeds according to routine. In response to an occasion for decision, even in the absence of a specific plan for dealing with that precise problem, the decision-making system works according to pre-determined general rules. Standard operating procedures govern what department has jurisdiction over an issue, at what level in the hierarchy the problem will be dealt with, how information about it is processed, what group will consider the problem, and how the internal dynamic of that group normally operates. The establishment of routine is the fourth way in which a decision-making system handles the problem of a dispersion of power.

#### Conditions Affecting Organizational Decision-Making

The conditions which will enhance the importance of cognitive processes have already been identified. They are, from the point of view of the decision-makers, where uncertainty and stress are high, time is short and inadequate for task complexity, and action is felt to be both necessary and potentially costly in terms of goals sacrificed. These conditions will be highly unsettling upon the decision-makers. They are consequently likely to have the following pronounced effects upon organizational processes:

1. Organizational routine will be disrupted and be replaced by extra-ordinary and ad hoc procedures. The felt necessity for acting quickly in conditions of uncertainty and conflicting goals is likely to produce this result.
2. The level of decision will rise in the hierarchical structure of the organization - in terms of both individuals and groups. Authority becomes more centralized. The above combination of conditions will lead lower-level decision-makers to feel that they must pass responsibility upwards and higher-level ones to feel that the problem is sufficiently urgent and serious for them to intervene and take charge.
3. Similarly, within the decision group, the importance of the leader will be enhanced. In the face of the necessity of action under conditions of uncertainty and goal conflict, he will be more likely to accept responsibility and followers will be more likely to expect and accept this.
4. The frequency of interaction of the group will increase. Its members will feel a greater need for face-to-face proximity. They will meet more often than normal to alleviate stress, to provide themselves with reassurance in the face of uncertainty and the potentially high cost of action, and to facilitate a quick decision.
5. Group processes are likely to rise in importance. Particularly as the frequency of interaction of the group increases, a group reality is likely to dominate the separate reality of each of its members. The definition of the situation, the formulation of alternatives, the choice of alternatives, and the consideration and interpretation of feedback are likely to be joint group ventures. The group is more likely to function as the initiator of policy rather than merely to be the authorizer or co-ordinator



of it and the forum for settling disputes.

6. Group cohesion will increase. To reduce stress, members are likely to stifle dissent and turn to each other for reassurance. Moreover, uncertain about what is happening and what to do, yet needing to make a quick decision, they will tend to focus upon group goals and values to provide clear guidelines for behaviour.
7. Ad hoc groups are more likely to be formed. The disruption of routine, the necessity for fast action, and the uncertainty which puts a premium on expert knowledge, are all conducive to this result. Moreover, ad hoc groups can be designed to exclude dissenters and thereby minimize stress.
8. Both departmental autonomy and bureaucratic politics are likely to decline in importance. The increased salience of the various aspects of group decision-making is likely to lessen departmental independence, heighten centralized control, and result in a group reality that dominates the parochial realities of its members. Furthermore, as the level of decision rises in the organizational hierarchy, decision-makers are more able to ignore or transcend parochial interests.

#### The Determinants of the Decision-Making Process

In response to an occasion for decision, cognitive and organizational processes combine to influence the analytical operations of decision-making. Underlying this overall process and giving it the specific shape it actually adopts are five fundamental determining factors. These are the personalities and beliefs of the individual decision-makers, the structure of the decision-making system, the nature of the environment, and both the substance and the structure of the occasion for decision itself.



### a) the individual

The character of any individual will influence his conduct of the analytical, cognitive, and organizational aspects of decision-making. Individuals search for and then interpret information about their environments in the light of their own belief systems: 'each of us constructs his own reality'.<sup>31</sup> In similar circumstances, different individuals will arrive at different conclusions and definitions of the situation, prefer different alternatives, and evaluate feedback differently. Moreover, the specific personality of the decision-maker will influence his ability to tolerate ambiguity and stress and how he deals with uncertainty and multiple goals. Similarly, his personality will also lead him to interpret his official role(s) in government in his own idiosyncratic manner. Finally, his personality will influence the way in which he conducts organizational decision-making: how willing he is to dispense with routine and accept responsibility, and how capable he is in group situations of putting his point of view across and getting his preferences adopted. In response to any problem, the personalities and beliefs of the decision-makers will provide one of the determinants of how the decision-making process functions and what decisions and actions actually emerge from it.

### b) the structure of the decision-making system

The structure of the decision-making system will likewise affect the decision-making process. It accounts for the existence of particular groups, the hierarchy of authority, the patterns of routine behaviour, and the manner in which the organization is fragmented into departments. Moreover, 'where you stand depends upon where you sit'.<sup>32</sup> By determining what roles are available, the structure of the decision-making system

provides goals and beliefs to the individual and thus influences both the nature of his cognitive processes and how he conducts the analytical operations of decision-making.

c) the environment

Neither aspect of the environment - neither its internal nor its external component - directly affects the decision-making process. Rather, the environment influences the goals and beliefs of the decision-makers, can lead to alterations in the structure of the decision-making system and of the individuals who fill its roles, and gives birth to problems which function as occasions for decision. The analyst who studies an example of foreign policy decision-making should be able to recognize alterations in the decision-making system and novel occasions for decision. However, it is not always possible to perceive directly any changes in the beliefs or goals of individuals. By looking at changes in the environment, he can infer that these might have occurred. Thus, while the environment is in a sense a second-order determinant of the decision-making process, it is necessary to include it.

d) the substance of the occasion for decision

The fourth determinant of the decision-making process is the substance of the occasion for decision. Every occasion for decision is surrounded by its own unique issues and circumstances. These in themselves are likely to influence the cognitive, organizational, and analytical aspects of decision-making. A government will respond to the bi-ennial renewal of a non-controversial fishing treaty with a friendly nation in a fashion distinctly different from the demand of a hostile neighbour for the immediate resolution of a border dispute. In the United States government, the decision-makers who dealt with the Yom



Kippur war were not identical to those who immediately thereafter had to handle the oil embargo. In Britain, the decision-making process following Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, which by-passed the formal machinery of the Foreign Office, differed considerably from that produced by the Rhodesian unilateral declaration of independence. The process varies with the specific substance of any particular problem.

e) the structural characteristics of the occasion for decision

Any occasion for decision also contains what can be called a structural element which will influence the decision-making process regardless of its substance. Occasions for decision can be defined in terms of three structural or generic characteristics:

1. the existence of threat.
2. the degree of anticipation, and
3. the time available for response.<sup>33</sup>

Threat consists of 'a potential hindrance or obstruction to some object or state of affairs that a decision-making unit is motivated to achieve'.<sup>34</sup>

Threat depends upon the decision-makers' themselves recognizing its existence: it 'is not merely an attribute of the stimulus; it depends upon the subject's appraisal of the implications of the situation'.<sup>35</sup>

All occasions for decision entail a choice in the pursuit of some objective; threat, however, occurs when the decision-makers view the problem as bringing the achievement of that object into question.

Anticipation may be defined as the degree to which the decision-makers expected the problem. It can range from the routine and completely foreseen to totally unexpected events that come as a surprise. As with threat, anticipation is judged from the point of view of the actors not that of an outside observer.<sup>36</sup> The third characteristic of an occasion for



decision is response time. It may, again in the eyes of the participants, be either short or long. It may also be closed-ended: carrying a deadline for response after which events foreclose the options available. For the decision-makers, the crucial aspect of response time is not its absolute measure but rather its perceived adequacy for the performance of the tasks inherent in the substance of the problem.<sup>37</sup>

Any particular combination of these three characteristics is likely to prove to have different effects upon the decision-making process. For example, an occasion for decision which presents no threat, has been well anticipated, and allows for a lengthy response time adequate for the degree of complexity is much more likely to be handled by routine procedures and to involve less reliance on the theories of the decision-makers to resolve uncertainty than is one where threat is present, anticipation negligible, and response time minimal.

Each of the three structural characteristics of the occasion for decision has distinct implications for the behaviour of the decision-makers and their conduct of the decision-making process. First, while all occasions for decision, by definition, provide a choice between alternative possibilities, the presence of threat to one or more goals actually produces an impetus to action; and, the more severe the nature of that threat, the more the decision-makers will feel that they must take action on the problem rather than merely consider it. Second, the greater the degree of anticipation, the greater are the opportunities to accumulate information and formulate plans in advance; conversely, surprise produces uncertainty about what is happening, what can be done about it, and what ought to be done about it. Third, response time dictates how quickly a decision must be made, and the more adequate it is for task complexity the more possible it is for organizational

decision-making to proceed in a routine fashion and the less necessary it is for decision-makers to have to compensate for uncertainty, complexity, and goal conflicts by undue reliance on cognitive techniques.

Particular combinations of threat, anticipation, and reaction time will have different effects on the nature of the decision-making process. This point is of the utmost importance, because an international crisis can be defined in terms of these three structural characteristics of the occasion for decision which make up the fifth determinant of the decision-making process.

#### A Definition of International Crisis

In the introduction to this work, crises were provisionally defined as a type of problem facing the state. As we have seen, such problems are occasions for decision for the decision-makers of that state. And, from the point of view of the decision-makers, all occasions for decision can be categorized in terms of their three structural or generic characteristics: threat, anticipation, and reaction time. What makes international crises a class of phenomena, comparable even when their issues are very different, is that they all exhibit an identical combination of these characteristics. For any state, a crisis occurs when the decision-makers of that state recognize the emergence of a problem and define that problem as

1. threat: presenting a severe threat to an important national objective,\*
2. anticipation: coming as a surprise, and
3. reaction time: allowing for a very short and closed-ended reaction time insufficient for task complexity.

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\* A national objective is one, such as peace, concerning the state as a whole, not some section of the government or some private individuals.



What makes a crisis international is the further perception on the part of the decision-makers that the problem involves the external relations of the state and that the decisions they make and the actions they take will have an effect on their international environment.

An international crisis, then, is a specific type of occasion for decision as defined by the decision-makers themselves.<sup>39</sup> In the process of decision-making, any occasion for decision performs two functions. It begins the decision-making process with respect to that problem and it provides the starting-point of the consequent decision situation. Therefore, when an occasion for decision fits the definition of international crisis, the decision-making process which it commences can be called crisis decision-making, and the situation which it begins can be called a crisis situation.\*

It is this definition which provides the critical connecting link between international crises and the process of foreign policy decision-making. In the first place, a structural definition of the sort proposed here is the necessary type of definition. On the most general level, there exist two possible views of crisis: as a turning-point or as a problem characterized by certain traits. The former comes from the science of pathology: 'the point in the progress of a disease where an important development or change takes place which is decisive of recovery or death'.<sup>40</sup> Applied to international relations, this conception serves as a useful and evocative description, indicating that a particular event or period of time threatened or actually marked the transition from one state of affairs to another. In this sense, the Thirty Years' War can be

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\* The term crisis can be applied to both a problem and its consequent situation. While each use is correct, it is important not to confuse the two. As a problem, a crisis influences the decision-making process. This process takes place within the crisis situation, but the definition of that situation is part of the process and not an exogenous influence upon it.



considered a crisis in the development of modern Europe, decisive for the ascendancy of the nation state and the secularization of international politics. The Treaty of Westphalia which ended that war

laid the formal basis of a new international order. It provided a watershed in at least three senses. First, it terminated the wars of religion occasioned by the Reformation; second, it finally reduced pope and emperor to the status of mere princes on a footing of equality; and, third, it legitimised an international order based on the existence of independent, sovereign states.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to this descriptive use, the turning-point definition can also be employed for analytical purposes. Charles McClelland is one notable proponent of this approach as an explanation of international relations. His focus, however, lies on the interactions among states not on the formulation of policy within them. He explicitly ignores all but systemic factors: 'no attention is given to the process of making decisions within governments under crisis conditions'.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, a turning-point is often recognizable only ex post facto. In general, this approach is not directly and immediately useful in explaining how crises affect foreign policy through their influence on the decision-making process.

The second broad approach to international crises views them in terms of their inherent characteristics. Two variants exist to this conception: the substantive and the structural. Substantive definitions 'identify the content of a particular policy, problem or situation'.<sup>43</sup> This approach severely restricts the scope of any definition. By defining crises in terms of specific issues, it provides no general basis for taking international crises as a class of phenomena, making comparisons among a wide number of examples, and then formulating a general theory of crisis decision-making. A substantive approach, then, does not fit with the purposes of this thesis. On the other hand, structural definitions 'emphasize generic characteristics of crisis'.<sup>44</sup> This

approach is far broader in its scope and divorces the definition of crisis from the specific issues involved. Of all the possibilities, a definition of crisis in terms of its structural characteristics is the most suitable for this thesis: unlike turning-point conceptions, it is compatible with a decision-making approach; and, unlike substantive definitions, it is independent of the issues involved in a crisis and allows international crises to be compared as a general class of phenomena.

Of course, various different structural definitions of crisis are possible. The particular one used here has been adopted for five good reasons.

First of all, it provides a clear theoretical connection between international crises and the process of decision-making as described above. We have seen how the structural characteristics of an occasion for decision provide one of the determinants of the decision-making process. By defining international crises in terms of these same structural characteristics, we have established a logical connection between crisis and the decision-making process. In the next section of this chapter, this logical connection will be used as the basis from which to derive those empirical propositions relating crisis to the decision-making process.

The second reason for choosing this particular definition of crisis is that it is restrictive. It excludes a number of problems which, while 'important' for foreign policy, are not actually crises. The two terms are not synonymous and to use them as such only reduces the value of the concept of international crisis to a merely evocative one. For example, the Russian acquisition of atomic weapons did not present the West with a crisis. Certainly, Soviet possession of a nuclear capability was viewed as a severe threat in western Europe and the United States; but



there was no immediate response required, and the development had been anticipated - if not quite so soon, at least in the not too distant future. Consequently, the definition provides reasonably clear criteria for distinguishing crises from other kinds of serious and potentially momentous problems and situations.

Third, this definition is from the point of view of the decision-makers themselves. The recognition of what constitutes a crisis rests in the hands of the participants. While posing problems, this requirement is absolutely essential. The decisions and actions of individuals reflect the information and goals they possess - not what an outside observer feels they ought to have possessed or has imposed upon the situation. To an extent, this approach is still objective: the definition of crisis has been established from without. However, it is subjective in that the identification of an occasion for decision as a crisis depends upon the actors' believing the necessary characteristics to be present. This imposes a considerable burden on the good judgement of the analyst and upon his ability to find enough information and to interpret it properly in such a fashion as to accurately gauge the feelings of the decision-makers. However, the alternative of some totally 'objective' definition is unacceptable because it ignores the fundamental determinant of behaviour: the actor's own beliefs.

The fourth reason for adopting this definition is its relative simplicity. Other conceptions of crisis include as many as twelve structural characteristics not all of which are independent.<sup>45</sup> The three dimensions of threat, time, and surprise, however, are easily remembered, fairly straightforward, and independent of each other. In practical terms, this approach is manageable.

The final reason for choosing this definition of crisis is that it has already been fairly widely used. It is fundamentally the one



developed by Charles Hermann and employed by him and by various other analysts. Glenn Paige used this definition for his study of the American decision to resist aggression in Korea in 1950 and also for a shorter comparison of Korea and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.<sup>46</sup> Ole Holsti adopted it in order to compare Cuba and the outbreak of the First World War;<sup>47</sup> he also utilized it in an article he co-authored with Alexander George on the effects of stress on decision-making.<sup>48</sup> Thomas Wiegele made use of it to look at the relationship of certain biological factors to crisis decision-making.<sup>49</sup> Hermann himself based a simulation on his own definition.<sup>50</sup> Howard Lentner derived a very similar conception as a result of his questioning officials of the United States Department of State;<sup>51</sup> and Edward Morse took a parallel approach for his examination of French foreign economic policy and the politics of interdependence.<sup>52</sup> Thomas Milburn availed himself of Hermann's definition for his analysis of crisis management,<sup>53</sup> and Michael Brecher chose it for his comparison of various decisions in Israeli foreign policy.<sup>54</sup> Based on an accumulation of work using this definition, a large number of empirical propositions relating crisis to foreign policy decision-making have already been developed and tested. Consequently, as this definition meets all the other requirements, it seems pointless to introduce a new one and thereby lose the advantages of comparability with previous work. Continuing with the same definition helps to contribute to the cumulative study of crisis decision-making.

#### A Summary of the Theory of Crisis Decision-Making

Five determinants of the decision-making process have been identified. These are the personalities and beliefs of the decision-makers, the structure of the decision-making system, the conditions prevailing in the environment, the substantive nature of the occasion

for decision, and the structural or generic characteristics of the occasion for decision. All of these factors can influence the four analytical operations of decision-making: both directly and indirectly through their effects on the cognitive and organizational aspects of decision-making. If, between two occasions for decision, the first four determinants of behaviour remain primarily the same, then any variations in the subsequent decision-making processes can be attributed to differences in the remaining determinant - the structural characteristics of the occasion for decision. The great importance of this point lies in the fact that international crises form a specific sub-set of occasions for decision, defined in terms of a unique combination of these three characteristics. Consequently, if the only distinction between two occasions for decision is that one is a crisis and one not, then differences in the decision-making processes following from them can be explained in terms of this distinction. This theory of crisis decision-making enables us, in the next section of this chapter, to deductively derive a number of empirical propositions relating crisis as the independent variable to various aspects of the decision-making process as dependent ones.

## II - Some Empirical Propositions

An international crisis is an occasion for decision which concerns the external relations of a state and which, in the eyes of the decision-makers, severely threatens important national objectives, comes as a surprise, and allows only a very short and closed-ended reaction time insufficient for task complexity. As has already been indicated above



(pages 38-39), an occasion for decision which has been defined in this manner will have certain general influences upon the decision-makers:

1. the intense nature of the threat will push them into wanting to take some action to defuse that threat;
2. the surprise will create great uncertainty concerning what is happening and what can and ought to be done about it;
3. the short, closed-ended and inadequate reaction time will mean that a decision must be made quickly, before uncertainty can be properly resolved through an intensive examination of the environment;
4. the necessity of fast action under conditions of uncertainty will produce the belief that the cost of action in terms of goals sacrificed is high, and this apprehension is likely to be correct because the severe threat will probably require measures that will in fact impose real costs on other cherished goals; and
5. as a result of all of these effects, the decision-makers are likely to feel under intense stress.<sup>55</sup>

Such are the general consequences that a crisis, as an occasion for decision, will have. On the basis of these consequences and the specific nature of the decision-making process as outlined above, it is now possible to derive the empirical propositions. These fall into four categories:

- A - those pertaining to cognitive processes,
- B - those pertaining to organizational processes,
- C - those pertaining to the four analytical operations, and
- D - one final proposition concerning the effects of crisis on the overall quality of decision-making.

In most cases, the propositions which follow are very similar to, if not identical with, ones which already exist in the literature. Thus, each will be accompanied by references to its appearances in other studies which have used the same definition of crisis and which have employed a comparable decision-making approach.



Therefore, testing the propositions actually achieves two purposes. The major one is to provide evidence either for or against the theory of crisis decision-making. At the same time, however, the results of other studies will be retested in the light of different and fresh historical material.

#### A - The Cognitive Aspects of Decision-Making

Cognitive processes enable the individual to cope with and to compensate for uncertainty and complexity in the environment, and conflicting goals and values. The theory of crisis decision-making has already shown that a decision-maker will rely most heavily on cognitive processes when he feels that

1. action is necessary,
2. complexity and uncertainty are high,
3. the cost of action in terms of goals sacrificed is great,
4. reaction time is short and insufficient for task complexity, and,
5. as a result, stress is intense.

These conditions have also been identified as those produced by international crises. Consequently, in crisis situations as opposed to non-crisis situations, those cognitive aspects of decision-making described above (pages 26-27) should increase in importance. The following propositions, therefore, derive deductively from the theory of crisis decision-making:

Proposition 1.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker narrows his focus of attention in terms of space: the boundaries of relevance he places upon his situation are much more restrictive, and he concentrates on a smaller section of the environment.

References: Ole Holsti and Alexander George, 'The Effects of Stress on the Performance of Foreign Policy-Makers', p. 279.<sup>56</sup>

Proposition 2.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker narrows his focus of attention in terms of time: he concentrates much more on the short run and places a higher discount on the future.

References: Michael Brecher, Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy, [H]ypothesis 23b, pp. 552-554.

Ole Holsti (H), 'Time, Alternatives, and Communications: The 1914 and Cuban Missile Crises', H47, p. 63.  
(The (H) after the author's name in this and other references indicates that the article and the numbering of the hypotheses come from Charles (H)ermann, editor, International Crises.)

Thomas Milburn (H), 'The Management of Crises', H296, p. 274.

Holsti and George, p. 280.

Proposition 3.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is much more likely to rely upon his experience, his theories, and his knowledge of historical parallels.

References: Brecher, H31, pp. 559-560.

Glenn Paige, The Korean Decision, H1.51, pp. 289-290, and H2.3 and 2.4, pp. 294-295.

Glenn Paige (H), 'Comparative Case Analysis of Crisis Decisions: Korea and Cuba', H15, p. 48.

Milburn (H), H272 and 273, p. 265.

Holsti and George, p. 279.

Proposition 4.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is more likely to misperceive and misinterpret his environment in order to reconcile conflicting goals.

References: Milburn (H), H292, p. 273.

Proposition 5.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is much more likely to alter the salience of his goals: by thereby reducing value conflicts, he provides himself with psychological reassurance and minimizes stress.

References: Holsti and George, p. 282.

Proposition 6.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is much more likely to try to find an alternative which satisfies all his goals even if it is not optimal for any particular one.

References: Holsti and George, pp. 281-282.

Proposition 7.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is much more likely to rely upon emotional responses and 'gut reactions'.

References: Milburn (H), H274, 275, and 276, p. 265.

Holsti and George, p. 280.

B - The Organizational Aspects of Decision-Making

Organizational behaviour explains how the decision-making process functions when the power of decision is dispersed among a number of individuals. The same conditions which emphasized the importance of cognitive processes have already been shown (pages 34-35) to produce certain distinct effects upon organizational ones. These conditions



having also been identified as identical to those produced by international crises, a number of propositions follow deductively from the theory of crisis decision-making:

Proposition 8.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, organizational routine will be disrupted and be replaced by extraordinary and ad hoc procedures.

References: Brecher, H31, p. 565.

Howard Lentner (H), 'The Concept of Crisis as Viewed by the United States Department of State', H71, p. 120.

James Robinson, 'Crisis Decision-Making: An Inventory and Appraisal of Concepts, Theories, Hypotheses, and Techniques of Analysis', p. 137.

Holsti and George, p. 296.

Proposition 9.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the level of decision rises in the organizational hierarchy: authority becomes more centralized.

References: Brecher, H42, pp. 565-566.<sup>57</sup>

James Robinson (H), 'Crisis: An Appraisal of Concepts and Theories', H9, p. 34.

Lentner (H), H84, p. 130.

Milburn (H), H279, p. 266.

Holsti and George, p. 296.

Proposition 10.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, group processes rise in importance: the four analytical operations are conducted more by groups and less by departments or individuals, and the group is more likely to initiate policy.

Proposition 11.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, ad hoc groups are more likely to be formed.

References: Brecher, H25, p. 555.

Paige, H1.1, pp. 281-285.

Paige (H), H10, p. 45.

Holsti and George, p. 296.

Proposition 12.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the frequency of interaction among the members of the group increases: a much greater need is felt for face-to-face proximity.

References: Brecher, H27, pp. 556-557.

Paige, H1.3, p. 288.

Holsti and George, p. 289.

Proposition 13.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, group cohesion is much greater: with the result that dissent tends to be stifled and group goals and values take on a superordinate role.

References: Paige, H1.4, pp. 288-289.

Holsti and George, pp. 289-290.

Proposition 14.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the group leader is more likely to accept responsibility, and followers are more likely to expect and accept this.

References: Brecher, H28, p. 557.

Paige, H1.5, p. 289.

Proposition 15.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, departmental autonomy and bureaucratic politics are likely to decline in importance.

References: Paige, H1.7, p. 290.

Holsti and George, p. 299.

C - The Analytical Operations of Decision-Making

The theory of crisis decision-making has divided the actual process of decision-making into four analytically distinct operations:

- a) the definition of the situation,
- b) the formulation of alternatives,
- c) the choice of alternatives, and
- d) the consideration of feedback.

Crisis will affect the conduct of each of these operations both directly and indirectly through its influence upon cognitive and organizational processes.

a) the definition of the situation

The definition of the situation consists of the decision-makers' attempts to gather and interpret information, and to identify those goals and values which will serve to guide their behaviour. Where the occasion for decision provides the starting-point of the decision situation, the definition of the situation establishes the boundaries of relevance and defines the nature of reality. Crises should have the following effects upon this operation:



Proposition 16.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the search for information will be greatly intensified.

Uncertainty, combined with the felt necessity for action and extreme time pressures should lead to an increased scanning of the environment.

The decision-makers may narrow their focus of attention, but within these restricted limits they will intensify their search for information.

References: Brecher, H30, pp. 558-559.

Paige, H2.1, p. 292, and H5.1, pp. 309-310.

Paige (H), H13, p. 47.

Holsti and George, pp. 280 and 298.

Proposition 17.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, decision-makers will tend to simplify the complexity of the environment.

This follows not only directly from the nature of crises but also from the combined effects of the narrowing of the focus of attention in both time and space (propositions 1 and 2) and from the likely attempts, in one way or another, to reduce goal conflicts (propositions 4, 5, and 6).

References: Brecher, H22a, pp. 551-552.

Robinson (H), H6, P. 33.

Holsti and George, pp. 279, 281, and 291.

Proposition 18.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, information moves with greater speed to the top of the organizational hierarchy.

In part, this is a consequence of the increased activity in searching for information (proposition 16); in part, it follows from the disruption of organizational routine (proposition 8), from the rise

in the level of decision-making (proposition 9), and from the formation of ad hoc groups likely to be based on expertise (proposition 11).

References: Brecher, H36, p. 563.

Paige, H2.2, p. 294.

Paige (H), H14, p. 47.

Holsti and George, pp. 296-297.

#### Proposition 19.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the reliability of the source of information is of greater importance for judging the validity of its content.

This follows directly from the lack of time in which to resolve uncertainty and to act. It is also a consequence of greater reliance on theories, experience, and historical parallels (proposition 3) and emotional responses (proposition 7); and it very likely will be encouraged by increased group cohesion (proposition 13) in so far as the source of information is a member of the group.

References: Paige, H2.11, pp. 292-293.

#### Proposition 20.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, greater variance is likely between the operational and psychological environments of the decision-makers.

On balance, despite the increased search for information, this is a likely result of a narrowing of the focus of attention (propositions 1 and 2), an increased reliance on theories (proposition 3) and emotions (proposition 7), the possibility of misperceiving the environment in order to resolve value conflicts (proposition 4), the increase in group cohesion and lesser tolerance of dissenting opinions (proposition 13), and a similar decrease in the number of opinions as a result of the reduced importance of bureaucratic politics (proposition 15).

References: Milburn (H), H299, p. 275.

Holsti and George, pp. 279-280.

Proposition 21.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, even where substantive issues are similar, the goals and values which are defined as relevant are likely to differ considerably.

This follows from the possibility of the altered salience of goals (proposition 5), from a greater reliance on theories and emotions (propositions 3 and 7), from a rise in the level of decision-making (proposition 9), from an increased reliance on group processes (proposition 10), from the possible formation of an ad hoc group (proposition 11), from a greater frequency of interaction among members of the group (proposition 12), from the likelihood of increased group cohesion (proposition 13), and from the enhanced importance of the group leader (proposition 14).

References: Lentner (H), H67, p. 117.

Paige, H3.1, pp. 296-297.

Paige (H), H17, p. 49.

b) the formulation of alternatives

On the basis of their definition of the situation, decision-makers will formulate a number of alternative courses of action for dealing with the problem.

Proposition 22.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, decision-makers are likely to formulate fewer alternatives.

In part, this follows directly from the extreme time pressures inherent in crises combined with the uncertainty of the situation. Any reasonable



policy is liable to be grasped, because action must be quick and because uncertainty makes it difficult to formulate other alternatives likely to be visibly better. This result also stems from the narrowing of the focus of attention (propositions 1 and 2), from the tendency for group processes to result in a single group reality (proposition 10), from increased group cohesion which can minimize dissent and lead to 'groupthink' (proposition 13), from increased reliance on the group leader (proposition 14), and from the decline in bureaucratic politics (proposition 15).

References: Charles Hermann, Crises in Foreign Policy, H21, p. 161.

Charles Hermann (H), 'Threat, Time, and Surprise: A Simulation of International Crisis', H138, p. 198.

Milburn (H), H291, p. 273.

Holsti and George, pp. 279 and 290.

Brecher, H22b, pp. 531-532.<sup>58</sup>

### c) the choice of alternatives

From the alternatives they have formulated, the decision-makers choose that one which they feel will best achieve their goals.

### Proposition 23.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the choice of alternatives is less likely to be based on a rational, objective, and dispassionate means-ends analysis and more likely to be based on emotional and secondary considerations.

This result is a consequence of the simplification of the environment (proposition 17), greater variance between psychological and operational environments (proposition 21), greater reliance on emotional responses (proposition 7), and greater group cohesion 'which may also become a superordinate rather than an instrumental value, thereby creating

greater pressures for conformity to group goals and norms, reducing tolerance for critical analysis and dissenting viewpoints, and eroding judgment' (proposition 13).<sup>59</sup>

References: Brecher, H22c, pp. 551-552.

Holsti and George, pp. 281 and 291.<sup>60</sup>

d) the consideration of feedback

On all but the simplest of problems, decision-making is likely to take place over several decision stages. The tentative or unsatisfactory decisions of one stage will produce certain consequences which then feed back into the decision-making system and provide a potential source of new information on the basis of which the decision-makers may reconsider their definition of the situation, their alternatives, and their choices.

Proposition 24.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, sensitivity to and learning from negative feedback are decreased: it tends either not to be noticed or to be discounted.

This proposition follows directly from the necessity for speedy action. Decisions must be taken and implemented before feedback can have a chance to build and make itself felt. Furthermore, this proposition also follows as a likely consequence of the narrowing of the focus of attention (propositions 1 and 2); increased reliance on theories and emotions, neither of which is as susceptible to modification by feedback as is direct information (propositions 3 and 7); increased group cohesion, which is likely to stifle dissent (proposition 13); and increased reliance on group processes as opposed to departmental autonomy or bureaucratic politics - both of which developments, by encouraging the formation of a single group reality, are likely to provide

decision-makers with reassurance for their actions and thus make it much easier for them to discount negative feedback (propositions 10 and 15).

References: Milburn (H), H271, p. 265, and H293 and 294, p. 274.

Holsti and George, pp. 279, 282-283, and 291.

#### D - The Quality of the Decision-Making Process

The quality of the decision-making process refers to whether it helped or hindered the reaching of a good decision. On balance, it appears likely that the effects of crises will be debilitating rather than beneficial.

#### Proposition 25.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the overall quality of decision-making tends to be lower.

The felt necessity of having to act quickly while under stress to a problem shrouded in obscurity is not likely to be conducive to effective decision-making. This conclusion is buttressed by the likely increase in the variance between psychological and operational environments (proposition 20), the formulation of fewer alternatives (proposition 22), and the less rational basis for choosing an alternative (proposition 23).

\*                      \*                      \*                      \*                      \*                      \*

These 25 propositions will, in the final section of this study, be tested against the evidence of British decision-making before and during the Hoare-Laval crisis. The results will be indicative, but unfortunately they cannot be wholeheartedly conclusive for the validity of the theory. The reason is not, as it might be in the physical sciences, the possibility of injecting ad hoc qualifications. Rather the tentative nature



of the findings is an unavoidable consequence of the self-awareness of the participants. Thus, during deliberations on the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy specifically absented himself from discussions in order to avoid stifling dissent and to encourage the formulation of a wider range of alternatives. Knowing the problems of crisis decision-making, decision-makers may take deliberate steps to counteract them. Nevertheless, the results of testing the propositions should be strongly suggestive for the validity not only of the propositions themselves but also, and ultimately more importantly, of the theory of crisis decision-making.

### III - A Framework for Analysis

The framework for analysis functions as a double set of instructions on how to conduct the case study. It tells the analyst both what to look for and how to organize his findings. The framework indicates what historical evidence must be included in order to describe and explain the decision-making process and to test the propositions, and it provides a format for presenting this material.

#### The Historical Evidence

The nature of the evidence that must be included in the case study is given in the first place by the theory of crisis decision-making. For each occasion for decision and its consequent situation, the decision-making process itself and the nature of its determinants must be described. The cognitive, organizational, and analytical aspects of decision-making and the stages in which they occur must be noted,

and in order to explain why this process took the form it did the five determinants of behaviour must be set out. The first of these is the environment. Its internal and external aspects must be presented in both psychological and operational terms. Decision-makers act on the basis of the former, but the latter is equally essential in order to account for feedback and to evaluate the quality of decision-making. The second and third determinants are the structure of the decision-making system and the personalities of the individual decision-makers. The fourth is the substantive nature of the occasion for decision, and the fifth consists of the structural characteristics of the occasion for decision.

In the second place, the nature of the historical evidence follows from the basic purpose of this thesis. The case study must include two or more decision situations. One of these must be a crisis situation: in other words following from an occasion for decision that was a crisis problem in terms of its structural characteristics. The other situations must be non-crisis ones. By comparing differences in the decision-making processes and differences in the determinants of behaviour in each situation, one can test the empirical propositions and thus the theory itself.

### Organizing the Case Study

The second task of the framework is to provide a basis for organizing the historical material. Two guiding principles are operative here. The first is to facilitate the testing of the propositions. The second is to present an interesting and readily intelligible account of what happened and why. This can be best done in three stages. The first consists of a brief overview of the case study. This places it in its wider context, outlines the fundamental issues involved, and

identifies the relevant occasions for decision and their consequent decision situations. Next, the domestic and international backgrounds are sketched in sufficient detail that the general influences operating on the decision-makers are clear. Finally, an account of the decision-making process and its determinants is provided for each decision situation. For the sake of readability, this takes the form of a chronological narrative and is not merely an itemized breakdown of the elements of decision-making. In this fashion, the evidence of the case study should tell a coherent and interesting story while at the same time being eminently suitable for testing the propositions.

On the basis of this analytical framework, the next section of the thesis presents the case study.



## Notes to Chapter One

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1. Michael Brecher, Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy, p. 2.
2. The meaning of the word 'government' is somewhat vague. As used here, it corresponds roughly to what in the United States is meant by the executive branch as opposed to the legislative or the judicial. In Britain, then, the government includes the various departments, agencies, and committees which are ultimately responsible to and controlled by the Cabinet, the individuals within these units, the members of the Cabinet, and other members of Parliament holding Ministerial rank.
3. In comparison, Richard Snyder, H.W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin (Foreign Policy Decision-Making, p. 65) have defined the decision-makers as 'those whose authoritative acts are to all intents and purposes the acts of the state', and Brecher (p. 3) has defined them as 'the individuals or groups with the authority to decide in the sphere of external behaviour'. I prefer a definition in terms of official roles because these are much easier to identify than is the concept of authority. For example, Robert Kennedy, as Attorney General of the United States, would not normally have exerted any authority over foreign policy decisions. Nevertheless, he was one of the most important decision-makers during the Cuban missile crisis. The definition used in this thesis would have included him in advance as a potentially relevant participant.
4. A large number of individuals can influence the nature of foreign policy. Inter alia, union leaders, businessmen, lobbyists, and editorial writers all may exert some pressure. However, while they may have 'access' to the system, they do not actually make the decisions (Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, p. 100).
5. Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, pp. 67 and 100-103.
6. This list is intended to be indicative not definitive.
7. For example, see Henry Kissinger, 'Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy'.
8. A goal is a value made specific. Thus, liberty is a general value and freedom of the press is a particular goal following from it. In this work, the two terms are used fairly interchangeably.
9. Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, p. 67 (emphasis in original).
10. Harold and Margaret Sprout, 'Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics' and 'Environmental Factors in the Study of International Politics'. In the latter (p. 319) they distinguish between 'the psychological environment (with reference to which an individual defines choices and takes decisions) and the operational environment (which sets limits to what can happen when the decision is executed)'.
11. Ibid., p. 314.

12. W. Riker, 'Events and Situations', Journal of Philosophy, 54, January 1957, quoted in Charles Hermann, Crises in Foreign Policy, p. 34 (footnote 38).
13. Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, p. 92.
14. Ole Holsti and Alexander George ('The Effects of Stress on the Performance of Foreign Policy-Makers', p. 271) use four similar operations: search, analysis, choice, and sensitivity to and learning from negative feedback. For a short summary of some alternative approaches to the decision-making process, see James Robinson and Roger Majak, 'The Theory of Decision-Making'.
15. Deciding not to decide and deciding to do nothing, while not identical, are both just as much 'decisions' as is the positive choice of a course of action.
16. The concept of feedback comes from the study of self-correcting mechanisms such as thermostats. For its application to political decision-making, see Karl Deutsch, The Nerves of Government, especially pp. 88-91, and John Steinbruner, The Cybernetic Theory of Decision, chapter 3.
17. Steinbruner, p. 45.
18. Steinbruner, p. 14.
19. Holsti and George (p. 263) refer to these two problems, respectively, as 'cognitive complexity' and 'multiple stakes'. The following discussion of cognitive decision-making is based on Holsti and George; Steinbruner; Sidney Verba, 'Assumptions of Rationality and Non-Rationality in Models of the International System'; and Robert Jervis, 'Hypotheses on Misperception'.
20. Joan Robinson and John Eatwell, An Introduction to Modern Economics, p. 154.
21. Holsti and George, p. 263.
22. Jervis, pp. 455-456.
23. 'Intense stress, although it may improve simple psychomotor output, impairs cognitive performance', Holsti and George, p. 278.
24. The literature on organizational decision-making is rather large. The following discussion is based primarily upon Richard Cyert and James March, A Behavioural Theory of the Firm; Robinson and Majak; Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power; Graham Allison, The Essence of Decision; Steinbruner; and Holsti and George.
25. The bureaucratic politics/departmental autonomy paradigm is only one - and not necessarily the most important - aspect of organizational decision-making. For trenchant critiques of the overarching explanatory power sometimes given, wrongly, to this approach, see Robert Art, 'Bureaucratic Politics and American Foreign Policy: A Critique' and Lawrence Freedman, 'Logic, Politics and Foreign Policy Processes'.

26. Glenn Paige, The Korean Decision, pp. 283-284.
27. Holsti and George, p. 285.
28. Ibid.
29. Joseph de Rivera, The Psychological Dimension of Foreign Policy, p. 431.
30. Holsti and George, pp. 286-287.
31. de Rivera, p. 431.
32. Allison, p. 176.
33. James Robinson, 'Crisis Decision-Making: An Inventory and Appraisal of Concepts, Theories, Hypotheses, and Techniques of Analysis', p. 117, and Hermann, p. 29.
34. Hermann, p. 29.
35. Holsti and George, p. 257.
36. Hermann, p. 30.
37. Robinson, pp. 118-119, and Hermann, pp. 29-30.
38. This definition is essentially that proposed by Hermann, pp. 29ff.
39. Hermann, p. 29.
40. Oxford English Dictionary. See Hermann and Robinson for discussions of various definitions of crisis.
41. F. Parkinson, The Philosophy of International Relations, p. 44.
42. In 'The Beginning, Duration, and Abatement of International Crises: Comparisons in Two Conflict Arenas', (p. 83), McClelland defines crisis as follows: 'A crisis refers to both a real prelude to war and an averted approach to war. Crises are most commonly thought of as interpositions between the prolongation of peace and the outbreak of war'. See also, his 'The Acute International Crisis' and 'Access to Berlin: The Quantity and Variety of Events, 1948-1963'.
43. Robinson, p. 112.
44. Ibid. Robinson actually uses the term 'procedural' rather than 'structural'. I have taken the liberty of changing it in order to keep the terminology of this thesis consistent.
45. Robinson, p. 114. He cites, for example, the twelve dimensions of crisis proposed by Anthony Weiner and Herman Kahn in Crisis and Arms Control.
46. Glenn Paige, The Korean Decision, p. 276, and 'Comparative Case Analysis of Crisis Decisions: Korea and Cuba', p. 42.



47. Ole Holsti, 'Time, Alternatives, and Communications: The 1914 and Cuban Missile Crises', p. 58, and Crisis Escalation War, p. 9.
48. Holsti and George, p. 262.
49. Thomas Wiegele, 'Decision-Making in an International Crisis: Some Biological Factors', pp. 305-306.
50. Hermann, pp. 29-36.
51. Lentner, p. 132.
52. Edward Morse, 'Crisis Diplomacy, Interdependence, and the Politics of International Economic Relations', p. 127.
53. Milburn, p. 262.
54. Brecher, p. 287.
55. See Robinson, Lentner, Milburn, and Holsti and George. The latter (pp. 257-262) define stress as 'the anxiety or fear an individual experiences in a situation which he perceives as posing a severe threat to one or more values.... stress occurs either when the subject experiences damage to his values or anticipates that the stimulus situation may lead to it'. They include crises as a sub-category of stress-producing stimuli. If threat alone produces stress, then combined with surprise and short response time it should produce even greater stress.
56. Holsti and George consider crises to be a sub-category of stressful stimuli; hence their findings ought to be applicable here.
57. Lentner, from whom Brecher borrowed this proposition, means by it a rise in the level of authority. Brecher interprets it as a contraction of authority: fewer individuals participating in the decision-making process. In his footnotes, however, he discusses Lentner's original meaning.
58. Brecher also hypothesizes (H40, pp. 564-565) that as stress increases within a crisis situation 'decision-makers will perceive the range of alternatives open to themselves to become narrower'. Holsti (H), H51, p. 70, tests the identical proposition.
59. Holsti and George, pp. 289-290.
60. Holsti and George (p. 299) indicate that this proposition is not likely to hold where bureaucratic politics are important for the decision-making process. In crises, however, the salience of bureaucratic politics should decline.

PART II

THE CASE STUDY

## Chapter Two

### An Overview



By the summer of 1935, on the eve of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the British Government faced a hostile and dangerous international environment. Japan and Germany both posed severe threats to peace and security, and the Government felt that the resources available to them in reply were grossly inadequate. To begin with, they knew that their own military capability was unsatisfactory. By 1935, though they were well aware of the necessity of rearming and had taken tentative steps in that direction, the actual measures implemented were hesitant and only in their initial stages. Similarly, the Government were equally unhappy with the international co-operation likely to be forthcoming. In the Far East, Britain stood alone. Neither the Soviet Union nor the United States, the only other great powers with significant interests and capabilities in the Pacific, was willing to take any concrete measures against Japanese expansion. In Europe, the situation, while somewhat better, was also unsatisfactory. The Americans and the Russians were only slowly emerging from their post-war isolation. As yet, neither counted for much against Germany. Britain's major ally on the continent was France; but, despite their underlying common interests, each held a very different attitude on how to deal with the German problem. Relations between the two countries were troubled.

Consequently, worried by their own military weakness and concerned with the lack of international co-operation, the British Government placed a high value on maintaining good relations with Italy, the remaining major power in Europe. This attitude rested on three bases. First, Italy sat perched on top of the imperial lifeline through Suez to India and the Pacific. Second, as of January of 1935, Italy and France had settled all their outstanding differences and agreed to a programme of military co-operation against Germany which freed a large number of French troops for redeployment on the German border. Third, three months later, in April, the two Latin nations had joined with Britain in forming the Stresa Front: aimed at guaranteeing Austrian independence by preventing the Anschluss. Italy, with her forces on the Brenner Pass through the Alps, played a crucial role in this alliance. Only she was in the position to take immediately effective action in the event of a German threat to Austria. In these circumstances, the British Government felt that a breach in Anglo-Italian relations might result in very unfortunate consequences. It could endanger Britain's main line of communication to the East and further strain her already overextended military capacity. It was likely to confront the French with an unpleasant conflict between two of their principal allies and thus aggravate the tensions in Anglo-French relations. Finally, it would probably shatter the Stresa Front and drastically weaken the anti-nazi forces. In sum, the British Government believed that incurring Italian enmity and losing her support would senselessly impose an extra burden on their weak military and diplomatic resources. They wanted to preserve the Stresa Front and avoid any clash with Italy which would have debilitating effects on Britain's defences and gravely injure the course of Anglo-French co-operation.

At the same time, the Government felt that it was essential for them to support the League of Nations. Public opinion strongly favoured a foreign policy based on Geneva, and the Government believed not only that they had to respect the wishes of the country but also that they needed to bow to those sentiments in order to remain in office and proceed with their programme of rearmament. Furthermore, they hoped that upholding the League might motivate the rest of Europe to co-operate against Germany and encourage the United States, with its strong legalistic-moralistic orientation to international relations, to emerge from isolation. Thus, partly in order to gain more international support and partly in order to maintain their domestic position and proceed with rearmament, the Government committed themselves to support the League of Nations.

By the summer of 1935, the alliance with France and Italy in the Stresa Front and support for the League of Nations were two key strands of British foreign policy. Unfortunately, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October of 1935 made them incompatible. The British Government confronted a grave dilemma. Opposition to Italy in support of the League and the principle of collective security threatened to destroy the Stresa Front - with severe attendant costs. Yet allowing Italy to proceed unhindered threatened to shatter the League of Nations - with similarly unpleasant results.

The story of British foreign policy during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict of 1935 is the story of how the Government attempted first to prevent and then to resolve this acute dilemma.

The story began in December of 1934 at the obscure watering hole of Wal Wal in the wastes of Ethiopia's Ogaden desert. At the beginning of that month, a skirmish took place between Ethiopian and Italian



military detachments. As a result, the two countries exchanged protests. Italy demanded apologies, compensation, and cession to her of sovereignty over part of the Ogaden. Ethiopia requested arbitration and appealed to the League of Nations to settle the dispute. For the next few months, while the League dithered and took no effective action, Italy and Ethiopia prepared for war.

For the British Government, the Wal Wal incident started a new decision situation. By raising the possibility that friendship with Italy might prove incompatible with support for the League of Nations, the Wal Wal incident confronted the Government with a new and major problem. As the summer of 1935 came and went, two simultaneous developments deeply troubled them. On the one hand, the likelihood of an Italian invasion of Ethiopia became a virtual certainty. On the other hand, domestic opinion overwhelmingly came to believe that Britain must support Ethiopia and the League in the event of Italian aggression. As a result, this first decision situation of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was characterized by attempts on the part of the British Government to prevent a war in East Africa and thereby to avoid having to confront the unpalatable choice between the Stresa Front and the League of Nations.

They failed. On 3 October, the Italian invasion began. This presented the British Government with another crucial occasion for decision and started for them the second decision situation of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. They now faced an actual rather than merely a potential clash between their two strands of policy. Nonetheless, they still hoped to avoid having to choose between them. Instead, they pursued a policy of dualism. At Geneva, they led the League in implementing sanctions against Italy; at the same time, together with the French, they searched for a compromise settlement satisfactory to Mussolini, acceptable to Haile Selassie and the League, and capable of

ending the fighting. Then, towards the middle of November, the imminent possibility of an extension of sanctions to include all oil and petroleum products loomed critically. This measure was felt to be potentially decisive, and the League was scheduled to discuss and probably approve it on 12 December. In an attempt to forestall this oil embargo, a flurry of Italian diplomatic activity let it be known that it would meet with grave displeasure and be interpreted as an unfriendly act; and rumours, encouraged by the Italian government, suggested that Mussolini would view it as a casus belli and launch a 'mad dog' attack on the British Mediterranean fleet. In consequence, this impending widening of sanctions threatened to destroy the Stresa Front. At the same time, the British Government knew that they could not, without good reason, reject the oil embargo: doing so would be tantamount to writing off the League of Nations.

In the light of this critical situation, Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Foreign Secretary, went to Paris on Saturday 7 December 1935 to discuss the problem with M. Pierre Laval, French Premier and Foreign Minister. The following day, the two men initialled a set of peace proposals for a compromise solution to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. This was the Hoare-Laval Plan: in return for considerable territorial and economic concessions to Italy, Ethiopia was to receive sovereignty over a port on the Red Sea and a corridor of access to it. Hoare and Laval were confident that they could persuade Mussolini, Haile Selassie, and the League to accept these proposals and end the war. The Foreign Secretary felt that he had extricated Britain from her dilemma.

Back in London, the rest of the Government felt otherwise. In their view, the Hoare-Laval Plan presented a problem which began the third decision situation of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. They believed that the Plan, rather than solving their dilemma, aggravated it by placing



them in a position where they could no longer continue to pursue their dual line of policy. They felt that rejecting the Plan would shatter the Stresa Front. However, unlike the Foreign Secretary, they believed that the Plan was unlikely to succeed and that accepting it would probably destroy the League of Nations. Faced with this highly unpleasant quandary, the British Cabinet met on Monday 9 December. They knew that they had to make an immediate decision. The scheduled meeting of the League in two days time, on Wednesday, imposed an absolute deadline. Moreover, the Foreign Secretary had publically committed himself to the proposals in a communiqué released in Paris on Sunday night. Any delay in deciding would in itself undermine his authority and force his resignation. In these circumstances, the Government approved the Hoare-Laval Plan: not on any merit in the proposals themselves but primarily out of loyalty to and respect for Sir Samuel Hoare. This decision produced disastrous consequences. Public reaction to the Government's decision, both at home and abroad, took the form of an immediate howl of execration. The Labour Party put down a motion of censure in the House of Commons, and the Government's own backbenchers threatened to vote against them. As a result, believing that their initial decision had been a mistake and frightened for their own survival, the Government reversed their position. They reneged on their support for the Hoare-Laval Plan and forced the Foreign Secretary to resign - a sacrificial lamb thrown to the wolves. These two ploys succeeded. On Thursday 19 December, ten days after their original decision to approve the Paris peace proposals, the Government defeated the motion of censure and ensured their continued tenure of office.

With the resignation of the Foreign Secretary and the survival of the Government, the Hoare-Laval crisis ended. The situation, however, was not restored to its prior state. The death throes of the Plan



permanently killed off the oil embargo and the chance of any effective League action against Italy. At the same time, with the continuation of fighting, the possibility of preserving the Anglo-French-Italian alliance against Germany also collapsed. The end result of this episode was that the Government lost each of their strands of policy. Stresa and the League both lay in ruins. By trying to preserve the two, the Government had ended up with neither.

From the point of view of the British Government, the Italo-Ethiopian conflict from December of 1934 to December of 1935 divided into three decision situations. Of these, only the final one was a crisis in terms of the definition proposed above. Thus, by comparing the decision-making process during the Hoare-Laval crisis with the processes during the two prior situations, we can test the empirical propositions derived in the first section of this work. The next two chapters will fill in the international and domestic backgrounds behind the dilemma facing the British Government. The following chapters will then present a detailed account of the decision-making process within the Government from the Wal Wal incident to the end of the Hoare-Laval crisis.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The British Dilemma:**

#### **I. The International Background**

The first of the two major causes of the dilemma facing the British Government was the nature of the international environment. The First World War finally destroyed the old order of the nineteenth century and swept away all the guiding principles of international conduct. The post-war settlement failed to solve the problems which had caused the war and was equally unsuccessful in creating a new, stable international order. As Marshall Foch so presciently observed upon hearing of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, it was not peace but an armistice for twenty years.<sup>1</sup> By the summer of 1935, the optimistic hope that the 1914-1918 conflict had been 'the war to end all wars' was dying. In an increasingly dangerous and disordered world, the British Government faced two clear threats to the peace and security of the Empire: from Japan and from Germany.

Japan emerged from the war the strongest state in the Far East. Nationalist sentiment and economic pressures ensured an outward orientation to her foreign policy, and the Twenty-One Demands on China indicated the form and direction it would take. The Washington Naval Conference, held during the winter of 1921-1922, temporarily checked Japanese expansion and appeared to unite Japan with the United States, Britain, and France in a four-power guarantee of the status quo in the



Pacific. However, the conference also ended the Anglo-Japanese alliance and gave Japan, already in possession of the world's third largest navy, a local military supremacy in the Far East. The post-war arrangements papered over but failed to solve the latent clash of interests between Japan and the Anglo-Saxon powers.

During the twenties, with a liberal government in office in Japan, any overt conflict was deferred, but in September of 1931 a new government took power. The rising tide of nationalism and the growing influence of the military in politics led to the pursuit of a much more aggressive foreign policy. That same month, Japan invaded Manchuria and a year later established her puppet state of Manchuko. China protested to the League of Nations which, in October of 1932, condemned the Japanese invasion and recommended the creation of an independent Chinese state in Manchuria. Japan rejected these findings and gave notice in February of 1933 of her intention to withdraw from the League. That body took no further action.

The Manchurian episode weakened the reputation of the League and deprived it of yet another of the great powers. It also warned the British Government of the Japanese threat in the Pacific. By 1935, they were very concerned with this situation, and in January of that year their Ambassador in Tokyo reported that:

Japan unquestionably believes in her destiny, and that is to be, and to remain, the dominant Power in the East. If the world is prepared to accept Japan at her own valuation peace will be preserved. Otherwise, Japan accepts no responsibility for any breach that may occur. The business world, the Court, the civilian departments most certainly do not want war, but it would be self-deception to suppose that they would constitute a determined opposition to the militarists if the ordered course of Japanese destiny were in danger.<sup>2</sup>

By 1935, however, Germany and not Japan presented the major danger to Britain. Neither the war nor the subsequent peace treaties solved the

German problem. The military results were inconclusive - Germany won in the east and lost in the west - and the post-war distribution of power shifted in her favour. The Turkish, Austrian, and Czarist empires were swept away, and to her east Germany faced only a large number of weak states; and the potential might of Soviet Russia was separated from Germany by a Poland that, while perhaps anti-German, was at least equally hostile to Moscow. Germany's strength towards the West was no longer automatically halved, and she remained potentially the strongest military power on the continent. Her population and store of natural resources were greater than those of her nearest rival, France; and she suffered virtually no direct war damage. By simply behaving as an independent state normally does, she could undermine the restrictions placed upon her and eventually emerge dominant in Europe.<sup>3</sup> Domestic feelings ensured that such would be the case. The war-guilt clause of the Treaty of Versailles,<sup>4</sup> the 'stab-in-the-back' myth, the festering sore of reparations, the humiliation of Danzig and the Polish corridor, the French occupation of the Ruhr, and the destruction of the middle class in the hyperinflation of the early twenties, all contributed to the intense dissatisfaction of the German nation. This was directed at the peace settlement and the western powers and ensured that Germany would take advantage of her naturally strong position to re-emerge as the most powerful state in Europe and to assert this strength in a new attempt at hegemony.

Almost immediately after Versailles, Germany started to rearm and contravene the provisions of the Treaty. These violations were systematically directed from the top offices of the Reichswehr with the complicity and approval of the highest-ranking politicians.<sup>5</sup> Hitler did not originate these measures, but he certainly stepped up their pace and scope. In November of 1934, a new law gave priority to rearmament and



directed that all other policies either be co-ordinated with or subordinated to that goal.<sup>6</sup> Defence expenditures increased rapidly. By agreement with the leadership of the army, Hitler initially remained reticent about these developments, but all such restraint ended in March of 1935 when he officially proclaimed the existence of the Luftwaffe, repudiated the Treaty of Versailles, announced the reintroduction of compulsory military service, and ordered that the standing army be increased to thirty-six divisions of roughly 550,000 men.<sup>7</sup>

By the summer of 1935, although Germany was still too weak to start a war or embark on a programme of territorial expansion,<sup>8</sup> she was rearming quickly and her intentions were clear. The domestic barbarism of the nazis was, or at least ought to have been, obvious to even the casual reader of The Times.<sup>9</sup> In October of 1933, Germany left both the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations; and her external aims were explicitly laid out in the programme of the nazi party: the abolition of Versailles, the establishment of greater Germany, and the conquest of lebensraum to the east.<sup>10</sup> Hitler's announcements of March 1935 indicated that those aims were not mere rhetoric. By 1935, although Germany did not quite yet possess the power to dominate the continent, she undoubtedly did have and did demonstrate that such were her plans. Moreover, a hundred years of German history did not give cause for optimism.

Certainly, the British Government were aware of the danger. In March of 1934, Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, circulated to his colleagues a Cabinet Paper outlining the ominous progress of German rearmament.<sup>11</sup> The following month, he distributed another Cabinet Paper by Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, on 'The Future of Germany'.<sup>12</sup> In a detailed physical and psychological dissection of Germany, Vansittart stressed the coming



danger, described the nazis' preparations for war, and emphasized that they were fostering to the extreme the German military spirit; he cautioned that Hitler's peace propaganda belied his true intentions. The General Staff agreed, warning at the beginning of 1934 that Germany might be ready for war in 1938 or 1939.<sup>13</sup> The Government were also aware of a continual increase in the rate of production of the German aircraft industry,<sup>14</sup> and the Cabinet Committee on German Rearmament recommended that immediate action must be taken.<sup>15</sup> In March of 1935, the Government issued a White Paper on Defence in an attempt to make the situation clear to the public; it concluded that increased expenditure on defence was absolutely necessary.<sup>16</sup> The following December, just before he went to Paris to deal with the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, Sir Samuel Hoare, who had replaced Simon as Foreign Secretary the previous June, circulated to his colleagues three recent despatches from Berlin on German rearmament and expansionist aims.<sup>17</sup> In his covering note, he stressed the tremendous efforts and sacrifices being made for the sake of those aims, and he warned that:

The peace which Germany desires is a German peace.... the present imbroglio in Abyssinia is mere child's play compared to the problems with which these German claims will in some not very distant future confront His Majesty's Government.<sup>18</sup>

To counter the German and Japanese threats, Britain had only her own military resources and such international support as might be forthcoming.

The Government were not very happy with the state of Britain's defences. From the post-war demobilization until the mid-thirties, British armaments existed at a dangerously low level.<sup>19</sup> The war ... ended with retrenchment and the curtailment of the military establishment

to beneath even a satisfactory peacetime condition,<sup>20</sup> and the ten year rule, instituted in 1919 by Lloyd George and made automatically renewable annually by Churchill in 1928, directed the Chiefs of Staff, in their strategic planning, to assume that no major threat would arise within ten years. The Royal Air Force was expanded after the war; but, by the spring of 1932, only 42 of the 52 squadrons authorized in 1923 were in existence, and the other aspects of air defence fared even worse. The Admiralty, at the London Naval Conference of 1930, were forced to accept a limit of fifty cruisers rather than the seventy which they felt were the minimum necessary to protect Britain's imperial lifeline. Construction of the Singapore naval base was progressing slowly (it was not to be completed until 1938); and, in 1933, a Cabinet Committee under Stanley Baldwin reported that 'the whole of the coast defences of the Empire at home and abroad are obsolete and outranged by the guns of a modern cruiser armed with 6-inch ordnance'.<sup>21</sup> The army, at the beginning of the thirties, was smaller than it had been in 1913 and was not organized for war in Europe; instead of being able to mobilize six infantry and one cavalry division in less than six weeks, the War Office could only put one of each in the field.<sup>22</sup> Military appropriations, which had been £116 million in 1926-1927, declined to £110 million in 1930-1931 and to £102.7 in 1932-1933.<sup>23</sup>

In 1932, galvanized into action by the Manchurian invasion and the Shanghai incident, the Government finally decided to reconsider the state of Britain's defences.<sup>24</sup> In response to urgent appeals from the Chiefs of Staff, they abolished the ten year rule and authorized certain temporary measures of air and naval rearmament.<sup>25</sup> The following year, the Chiefs of Staff indicated their extreme alarm over the growing danger and warned that the armed forces, given their existing strength

and armaments, could no longer be responsible for national and imperial defence.<sup>26</sup> In response, the Cabinet appointed the Defence Requirements Committee (DRC) in November of 1933 to review the entire state of British defences. Their first report, considered by the Cabinet on 7 March 1934, identified Japan as the immediate threat but placed Germany as 'the ultimate potential enemy.... in her case we have time, though not too much time, to make defensive preparations'. The DRC recommended greatly enlarged appropriations for the three services: a total of £71 million over the next five years.<sup>27</sup> Aware of the necessity to rearm, but worried about public opinion and the nation's finances, the Government decided to reduce the amount suggested and to concentrate the remainder upon the RAF.

Indeed, of all the concerns troubling the Government, none aroused more disquiet than the situation in the air. The power of the bomber was vastly overrated, and, though the army and navy dissented, 'both the Cabinet and the country as a whole saw in the air attack the greatest threat to Britain'.<sup>28</sup> The DRC warned that:

In view of the enormously increased output capacity of Germany, there is the possibility of attack so continuous and concentrated and on such a scale that a few weeks of such an experience might so undermine the morale of any civilian population as to make it difficult for the Government to continue the war.<sup>29</sup>

Having witnessed the failure of strategic bombing campaigns to achieve much of anything either in World War Two or in Vietnam, we have trouble understanding these sentiments; but Baldwin's remarks that the bomber would always get through and that the frontier of Britain was now at the Rhine indicate how potent air power was considered to be and how feared mass bombing was.<sup>30</sup> 'In judging the politics of these years we should never leave out of mind the paralysing fear of being bombed, even at



impossible ranges, by what we should now dismiss as a small scale attack by mere "conventional" weapons.<sup>31</sup>

In 1935, defence and rearmament were vital concerns of the Government. In March, the White Paper on Defence publically began to mark the reorientation of policy from disarmament and collective security to deterrence and increased defensive measures:

events in various parts of the world have shown that nations are still prepared to use or threaten force under the impulse of what they conceive to be a national necessity; and it has been found that once action has been taken the existing international machinery for the maintenance of peace cannot be relied upon as a protection against an aggressor.

The White Paper concluded that:

an additional expenditure on the armaments of the three Defence Services can, therefore no longer be safely postponed.<sup>32</sup>

In the second half of the year, the Government continued to worry about the weak condition of Britain's defences. Cabinet debates on the subject of Ethiopia were replete with references to the overstretched and inadequate resources of the armed forces. At the end of November, just before the climax of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, the DRC reported in the gloomiest terms.<sup>33</sup> Painting an extremely bleak picture of the international situation, they concluded that Britain's defences were inadequate for their purposes and responsibilities:

From the above observations one fact stands out pre-eminently. Whatever means we adopt to forward our main policy of preserving peace, there is no alternative to our raising our armaments to a far more effective standard than they will attain when existing approved programmes are completed.<sup>34</sup>

As well as being aware of the deficiencies in their own defences, the Government were also dissatisfied with the international support available. They felt it to be insufficient and unreliable.

In the Far East, Britain stood alone against Japan. None of the other European powers was either willing or able to be a factor in the Pacific. Only the United States and the Soviet Union had compelling interests there, and neither wished to enmesh herself in a conflict with Japan. The Russians, though they had stationed their best troops in the East, had no navy to speak of, only wanted Japan to leave them alone, and had very mixed attitudes towards the entire China question - being interested in turmoil and revolution. The Americans equally shared this attitude of non-involvement over the Manchurian issue. From the beginning, they were opposed to any action, confining themselves to moral condemnation and the doctrine of non-recognition.<sup>35</sup> Against Japan, Britain could count on support from no one.

In Europe, the Government could also not rely on any help from either the United States or the Soviet Union. Immediately after the end of World War One, both withdrew into isolation. By 1935, the Democrats had returned to the White House, and the new administration wanted to adopt a less isolationist policy; but the ravages of the depression, the climate of public opinion, and the neutrality legislation passed by Congress ensured that steps in that direction would be slow and tentative. As late as January of 1935, the Senate refused to ratify the protocol of adherence to the Permanent Court at the Hague.<sup>36</sup> By the same date, the Kremlin had taken greater strides back onto the stage of world affairs. In 1934, Russia finally joined the League of Nations and assumed, under the nominal guidance of Maxim Litvinov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, a pro-western, anti-fascist stance; but her arms were an unknown and not very highly regarded quantity; her communist



government was at best disliked and at worst actively distrusted; and geography, in the guise of Poland, reduced her potential effectiveness against Germany.

Of no more practical value against the German threat was the League of Nations. Born in the aftermath of the war as a brave attempt at creating a new international order, it was virtually condemned to failure from the outset. The United States was never a member; and, though the Soviet Union joined in 1934, by that same date Japan and Germany had withdrawn. Moreover, the major powers that occupied permanent seats on the League Council disagreed fundamentally on the shape of the post-war world. With four of them (the USSR, Germany, Japan, and Italy) having revisionist outlooks and being interested in overturning rather than maintaining the status quo, the League had little chance for success. Nevertheless, in the relatively tranquil decade of the twenties, it appeared to be working. However, while the predominantly Conservative British Governments of the period gave the impression of supporting it, they took good care to ensure its lack of teeth.<sup>37</sup> By 1935, both the Foreign Office and the services actively disliked and distrusted the League of Nations, and many members of the Cabinet shared this attitude. While some Ministers, notably Anthony Eden, actually supported it out of principle, the majority of them placed little faith in it. Rather, they felt constrained to support it mainly because of domestic pressures but also because they hoped by doing so to demonstrate Britain's willingness to oppose aggression, thereby further encouraging the United States out of her isolation and motivating the rest of Europe to unite against Germany rather than seek accommodation with her. For the British Government as a whole, the League of Nations was important for domestic reasons and for mobilizing international co-operation. But it had, in the eyes of most decision-makers little tangible worth against Germany.



Of far more potential importance to Britain was French support. With the strongest army in Europe in 1935 and having already fought beside the British against Germany in the last war, France was Britain's most important ally. Unfortunately, the Anglo-French entente was shaky. At Versailles and after, the two countries took fundamentally different approaches to the future. The French wanted security against a revanchist Germany. Their overriding goal was 'never again'; it was to ensure that Germany would not be able, for the third time since 1870, to invade France. The British wanted only to prosper in a world restored to its pre-war state. The initial disparities between the two, first demonstrated at the peace conference itself, continued over the Chanak crisis of 1922, over the French occupation of the Ruhr the following year, over the entire question of reparations and war debts, over French endeavours to reconstitute the Dual Entente through a network of eastern alliances in which the British placed little faith and towards which they did not wish to become committed, and over British attempts such as the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935 at rapprochement with Germany.<sup>38</sup> In any future war, France would be Britain's most important European ally; but in 1935 relations between the two, despite their common interests, were strained. Moreover, the British Government considered France to be an unreliable ally because of the latter's domestic political instability.<sup>39</sup>

In Europe, the only other potential support of major significance available to Britain against Germany was from Italy. She emerged from the war free of all major problems; she needed tranquility, rest, and economic prosperity.<sup>40</sup> Instead, she got Mussolini and the feeling, especially pronounced in conservative and nationalist circles, that she was cheated at Versailles out of her just spoils of war.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Italy's dissatisfaction and revisionism posed no threat to Britain; and, after the sorting out of the immediate post-war problems, relations

between the two countries remained untroubled.<sup>42</sup> Mussolini and Sir Austen Chamberlain were on good personal terms and even, in 1925, contemplated carving up Ethiopia. In 1933, the British Government went so far as to direct the services not to consider Italy as a potential enemy.<sup>43</sup>

In fact, Italy, Britain, and France were drawn together on the issue of Austrian independence. No other problem in Europe (except the extremely remote possibility of a Franco-German alliance) presented the slightest danger to Italy. Austro-German unification, however, threatened both to pose a military menace to Italy and to deprive her of a client state. Consequently, from as early as 1931, Italy co-operated with France and Britain in opposition to the Anschluss. Although this was forbidden by Versailles and by the Treaty of Saint Germain between the allied powers and Austria, nevertheless, in March of 1931 under the pressures of the economic crisis, Austria and Germany proposed to form a customs union. Italy, France, and Czechoslovakia immediately protested, and the project was dropped. A year later, in May of 1932, Dollfus became Chancellor of Austria as the leader of a coalition of clericals and fascists and, supported by Mussolini, opposed the Anschluss. In February of 1934, Britain, France, and Italy jointly declared their support for the maintenance of Austrian independence. The following July, the Austrian nazis attempted a putsch in which Dollfus was murdered. The coup failed, and Mussolini sent four extra divisions to the Brenner and wired to the Austrian Vice-Chancellor that the independence of his country was 'a principle that has been defended and will be defended even more strenuously by Italy'.<sup>44</sup> The Italian press followed this declaration with an anti-German campaign, and a few days later Mussolini

expressed his disgust at the 'night of the long knives'. Two months later, in September, Britain, France, and Italy repeated their declaration on the preservation of Austrian integrity.

In January of 1935, Franco-Italian relations, based on their common anti-German interests, were placed on a solid footing. Laval and Mussolini met in Rome and concluded a series of agreements settling all the outstanding differences between the two - including their conflict in North Africa resulting from Mussolini's empire building attempts. The two crucial points concerned Ethiopia and military consultations. With respect to the former, Laval ceded Mussolini a free hand economically; except for the Addis Ababa-Djibuti railway, France abjured all economic interests in Ethiopia. Whatever else Laval might or might not have said, the Duce interpreted this concession to extend to the political sphere and to mean a green light for invasion. For the French, the military aspects of the agreements were the important ones. Talks began, and in June Gamelin and Badoglio, the two Chiefs of Staff, reached agreement on joint action in the event of a German attack on either France or Austria. There would be a French army corps in the Italian order of battle, an Italian corps on the Franco-Swiss frontier, and Italian air bases in southern France.<sup>45</sup> This agreement released from the Italian border an extra 200,000 soldiers which the French could redeploy against Germany.<sup>46</sup>

Then, in April of 1935, Anglo-French-Italian co-operation reached its peak with the establishment of the Stresa Front. After Hitler's declarations of March (the denunciation of Versailles, the imposition of conscription, the admission of the existence of the Luftwaffe, and the expansion of the German army), the League Council scheduled an emergency meeting. At Mussolini's invitation, British and French leaders and officials first met with their Italian counterparts at the resort of Stresa on the shore of Lago Maggiore. This meeting produced a united



anti-German front and the reaffirmation of previous pledges on Austrian independence. The three powers drew up a resolution condemning Germany's unilateral denunciation of the Treaty of Versailles. On 17 April, the Council unanimously approved it.<sup>47</sup> Stresa marked the zenith of Anglo-French-Italian co-operation against the nazi menace.

In the light of their view of the international environment, the British Government feared that any action which turned Italy hostile was liable to produce very undesirable results. It would endanger the imperial lifeline to the East, thereby stretching even more Britain's already inadequate military resources and reducing their effectiveness.<sup>48</sup> It would shatter the Stresa Front and drastically weaken the anti-German forces. Finally, it would exacerbate the strains in Anglo-French relations and jeopardize co-operation between the two countries: the British Government were aware of the importance that the French placed on their alliance with Mussolini and felt that any conflict between Britain and Italy would alienate the French, who might then leave the British totally unsupported in the event of an Anglo-Italian naval clash in the Mediterranean.

Thus, when the Government realized the serious nature of Italian designs on Ethiopia, they were very hesitant to take any steps that might irretrievably alienate the Italians or, even worse, lead to active conflict between Britain and Italy. This reluctance to oppose Mussolini threatened to jeopardize the future of the League of Nations, because a second failure on its part - after its previous ineffectiveness over Manchuria - would undoubtedly have spelled its demise. Nevertheless, pressure from the external environment convinced most of the British Government of the importance of preserving the Stresa Front and Anglo-

French and Anglo-Italian co-operation. Unfortunately for the Government, domestic pressure was simultaneously pushing them in the very opposite direction: in support of Ethiopia and the League of Nations against Italian aggression.

### Notes to Chapter Three

1. Winston Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p. 7.
2. Despatch number F 1090/483/23 sent on 7 January 1935 by Sir Robert Clive. Circulated as Cabinet Paper 80(35) and considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 1 May 1935.
3. A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War, p. 27.
4. This was Bethmann Hollweg's enduring and most disastrous legacy. By waiting for Russia to mobilize before unleashing the German army, he convinced the German people that they were fighting a defensive war. Hence, the violent hatred for the peace treaty and particularly this clause. See Fritz Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War, pp. 72-78.
5. Berenice Carroll, Design for Total War, p. 58.
6. Arthur Schweitzer, Big Business in the Third Reich, p. 299.
7. Carroll, p. 74.
8. Carroll, p. 67 and Taylor, p. 32.
9. I have read The Times for 1935 and can vouch for the presence on its pages of numerous articles detailing enough of what was happening within Germany to have left little doubt as to the nature of the regime and the society. As early as December-January 1934-1935, The Times carried full reports on injustice, atrocities, and repression, including one article on 24 January on concentration camps.
10. Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny, p. 316.
11. Cabinet Paper 82(34), 21 March 1934. 'Germany's Illegal Rearmament and its Effect on British Policy.'
12. Cabinet Paper 104(34), 7 April 1934.
13. Basil Collier, The Defence of the United Kingdom, p. 26.
14. Cabinet Paper 205(34), 31 July 1934, 'The Disarmament Conference 1932'. Ministerial Committee, Defence Requirements Report: as amended and approved by the Cabinet at their meeting of 31 July 1934. And Cabinet Paper 268(34), 23 November 1934: Memoranda from the Admiralty, the War Office, and the Air Ministry on German rearmament.
15. Cabinet Papers 265(34) and 295(34), 23 November and 11 December 1934. Two reports from the Cabinet Committee on German Rearmament. The Committee consisted of Ramsay MacDonald, Lord Hailsham, Sir John Simon, and Sir Samuel Hoare.
16. British White Paper on Defence, 4 March 1935. Cmd. 4827.



17. Cabinet Paper 217(35), 25 November 1935. These despatches from Sir Eric Phipps, British Ambassador in Berlin, were numbers 1129, 1160, and 1178 of 6, 13, and 18 November 1935.
18. Ibid.
19. The first report of the Defence Requirements Committee (DRC 14, circulated as Cabinet Paper 64(34), 7 March 1934) gave the following chart on the percentage change in total defence expenditure as compared with 1925-1926 as a base year:

United Kingdom	- 19.6	in	1932-1933
USSR	+ 197.0	in	1933-1934
Japan	+ 110.8	in	1934-1935
France	+ 100.9	in	1933-1934
Germany	+ 12.3	in	1933-1934
USA	+ 10.3	in	1933-1934
Italy	+ 9.7	in	1933-1934

The DRC was a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. It was appointed in November of 1933 to review fully Britain's defences. The Chairman of the DRC was Sir Maurice Hankey, the Secretary to the Cabinet. The other members were Sir Robert Vansittart, Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Warren Fisher, Secretary to the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service, and the three Chiefs of Staff.

20. Collier, pp. 4-6.
21. Collier, p. 24.
22. Collier, pp. 15-22, for most of the details in this paragraph.
23. C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940, p. 475.
24. Collier, p. 24.
25. Ibid.
26. F.A. Johnson, Defence by Committee, pp. 224-225.
27. DRC 14, (see note 19 above).
28. Sir Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany 1939-1945, volume i, Preparation, pp. 86-88. After the First World War, strategic bombing was considered the object of the RAF; and, until 1938, despite minor modification, the idea prevailed that a counter-offensive was the only reply to the German threat in the air.
29. DRC 37, p. 9. The third report of the Defence Requirements Committee, 21 November 1935. Available in the Public Record among the Hankey Papers: CAB. 63/50.
30. H. Montgomery Hyde, Baldwin: The Unexpected Prime Minister, p. 354. For a description of Baldwin's almost pathological fear of strategic bombing, see Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin, pp. 731-737.



31. Leo Amery, My Political Life, volume iii, The Unforgiving Years 1929-1940, p. 183.
32. British White Paper on Defence, 4 March 1935. Cmd. 4827.
33. DRC 37, 21 November 1935.
34. DRC 37, p. 8, my emphasis.
35. Taylor, p. 62.
36. F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations, p. 565.
37. For example, Sir Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Secretary from 1925 to 1929, made sure in 1925 to kill the Geneva Protocol which might have put some force behind the League.
38. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935, based on lines suggested by Hitler to Sir John Simon the previous March, limited Germany's naval tonnage to 35 per cent of that of the British Commonwealth but conceded her the right to equal submarine tonnage. In the latter case, however, Germany undertook not to exceed 45 per cent without giving notice. While the groundwork for the Agreement had been done by Simon, it was actually concluded by Sir Samuel Hoare, with the backing of both the Foreign Office and the Admiralty. At a meeting of Ministers on 5 June 1935, all present supported it, except Anthony Eden who feared it would strain relations with France. To Stanley Baldwin, the Agreement functioned primarily as a signpost to Hitler's intentions; to Hoare, it served as a play for time by himself and Vansittart.

Hoare claimed in his memoirs that the Agreement worked as the German navy was of little consequence at the beginning of World War Two. His argument is of dubious validity as Hitler was not interested in or concerned with naval matters, and it is doubtful that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement had any effect whatsoever upon German naval strength. See, W.N. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy Since Versailles 1919-1963, pp. 139-140; Middlemas and Barnes, pp. 826-828; and Viscount Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, pp. 135-149.

Eden's fears were accurate. While of no practical significance, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement had unfortunate consequences on opinion throughout Europe, and especially in Rome, Moscow, and Paris. See, Gaetano Salvemini, Prelude to World War II, p. 223; Bullock, p. 338; and Sir Walford Selby, Diplomatic Twilight 1930-1940, p. 49.

39. Throughout the post-war era, Anglo-French relations were complicated by instability within France. Her society was rent by moral and intellectual disorder, and the fascist leagues reached their peak in 1935. Furthermore, French governments alternated between the left and the right, making continuity in policy difficult. Leftist governments generally tended to co-operate more closely with Britain. Unfortunately, Laval represented the right. In fact, he gave moral support and financial backing from secret government funds to the Croix de Feu. William Shirer, The Collapse of the Third Republic, p. 183. See also, Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France between Two

Wars; J.P.T. Bury, France 1814-1940; and Marc Bloch, Strange Defeat.

40. Salvemini, p. 28.
41. H. Stuart Hughes, 'The Early Diplomacy of Italian Fascism, 1922-1932', p. 212.
42. Hughes, p. 229.
43. In November of 1933, on the recommendation of the Committee of Imperial Defence, the Cabinet decided that 'no expenditure should for the present be incurred on measures of defence required to provide exclusively against attack by the United States, France, or Italy'. Quoted from DRC 37, p. 6.
44. Laura Fermi, Mussolini, p. 345.
45. D.C. Watt, 'Document: The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreement of 1935 on Ethiopia'.
46. The Times, 29 November 1935.
47. Walters, p. 614. The Council also established a committee to study the application of sanctions. Ironically, Italy was a member.
48. The third report of the Defence Requirements Committee (DRC 37, 21 November 1935) concluded on page 6 that:

Our experience of the incalculable danger to our national and imperial security involved in a fully armed and militarist Germany provides overwhelming reasons for avoiding any further estrangement either of Japan (the treaty with whom we unfortunately had to abandon), or of any Mediterranean Power which lies athwart our main artery of communication to the East.

Italy was just such a power.



\ Chapter Four  
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The British Dilemma:  
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II. The Domestic Background  
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The second major cause of the dilemma facing the British Government was the nature of their domestic environment.<sup>1</sup> They felt that economic conditions, public opinion, and the electoral situation necessitated that they proceed very slowly and cautiously with rearmament and that they fully support the League of Nations.

#### Economic Conditions

By the mid-thirties, though aware of the urgency of rebuilding their defences, the British Government felt that economic conditions placed a severe brake on the rate at which they could do so. During the years following the First World War, economic issues were a major factor in every election and one of the principal problems troubling all successive Governments. Despite certain individual and regional gains, the economy as a whole was not healthy.<sup>2</sup> Exports stagnated and the traditional industries declined, giving rise to the horrible depressed areas and to massive, long-term unemployment. In the slump of 1920, the number out of work reached ten per cent and was never to fall below that level until World War Two.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Britain was no longer the world's leading industrial power, and the war had swept away the sterling standard and the City's unrivalled control of international finance. After the

depression, Britain could no longer pay her own way in the world and had to exist on her overseas capital.<sup>4</sup>

In August of 1931, the international monetary crisis, which had started in Austria in May and spread to Germany in July, finally crossed the Channel. The Labour Government, unable to decide what to do, split into two, the majority of the Cabinet resigning and the remainder following Ramsay MacDonald into a coalition with the Liberals and Conservatives. Almost immediately, this new National Government, still nominally led by MacDonald though dominated by Baldwin and the Tories, took the country off the gold standard and effectively devalued the pound, thereby doing precisely what they had been formed to avoid. Otherwise, the Government responded to this crisis, as to the depression as a whole, in a strictly orthodox manner. They cut spending and balanced the budget. A few voices, notably those of Keynes, Lloyd George, and Sir Oswald Mosley, cried out for deficit finance and the reflation of the economy. They were ignored.

This financial conservatism at the Treasury and within the Cabinet, combined with the general decline of the British economy, slowed the pace and narrowed the scope of rearmament. In his budget of 1932, Neville Chamberlain brought in an arms estimate of £102.7 million, an amount smaller than that proposed by any Labour Government and the lowest of the entire interwar period.<sup>5</sup> Two years later, when the Defence Requirements Committee recommended massive rearmament, the Exchequer declared that such rearmament was impossible to carry out,<sup>6</sup> and the Government drastically slashed the suggested increase in spending.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in 1935, financial considerations led them to cut back on the implementation of proposed defensive measures of air warfare.<sup>8</sup> By the summer of that year, despite the recommendations of the Defence Requirements Committee and the publication of the White



Paper on Defence, rearmament was progressing only very slowly. In part, this was due to the ill health of the economy and the orthodox financial thinking of the Government. As a result, the British Government could not rely on their own defences to meet threats from Japan and Germany. They needed international support.

### Public Opinion

Even more influential in determining the Government's foreign policy was the pressure of public opinion. The First World War did not in Britain, as it did in France, produce a lasting and general anti-German climate. Instead, because a large number of people felt that French fears for the future were greatly exaggerated and German resentment of Versailles justified, and because France and not Germany had for years been Britain's traditional enemy, much pro-German, anti-French sentiment existed. It remained strong even after the nazis seized power and their barbarism and repression were noted in the press. Perhaps many agreed with Lord Rothermere's Daily Mail, which welcomed Hitler's election success in the fall of 1931 as a reinforcement against bolshevism,<sup>9</sup> or with The Times, which in July of 1934 could opine that 'in the years that are coming, there is more reason to fear for Germany than to fear Germany'.<sup>10</sup> Even on 4 April 1935, just after Hitler had denounced Versailles, imposed conscription, announced the existence of the Luftwaffe, and ordered the expansion of the German army, The Times could state in an editorial that too much stress had been laid on the negative side of Hitler's statements and not enough on the positive side.<sup>11</sup> These illusions were shared by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, on 5 June 1935 at the opening of the convocation of the Church of England, announced that 'the true way is to regard what Hitler said as sincere',<sup>12</sup> and by the Prince of Wales, who, in an address a few days

later to the British Legion, proposed that a deputation be sent to Germany 'to stretch forth the hand of friendship'.<sup>13</sup> These pro-German feelings extended to circles even closer to the seat of power, to the Cliveden Set, later to become one of the centres of support for Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement,<sup>14</sup> to the backbenches of the Conservative Party,<sup>15</sup> and even to a small degree into the Cabinet itself.<sup>16</sup> Both Sir Samuel Hoare and Anthony Eden, the two Cabinet Ministers at the Foreign Office during the Hoare-Laval crisis, noted and objected to these pro-German trends which, while rarely reaching the very highest levels of the Government, were widespread in the country as a whole. By failing to understand the threat from Germany and by viewing the international situation with relative equanimity, public opinion made it much more difficult for the Government to rearm and to follow policies directed towards what they knew to be the severe German menace.

Furthermore, the horrors of war aroused within Britain the feeling of 'never again'. The

British people refused even to consider the possibility of another war. The last war had been so terrible in its devastations, that it was 'unthinkable' that this degrading and humiliating internecine strife between civilized countries could be repeated. War was not only intolerable, it was incredible.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, in the aftermath of the carnage of World War One, the majority of the public supported disarmament and the League of Nations. This attitude, understandable in the relatively tranquil twenties, persisted unabated into the much more dangerous decade of the thirties. The Labour Party, at their annual conference in October of 1933, urged the Government to abolish the private manufacture of armaments in Britain, to disarm completely in the air, and to do away with all weapons which were forbidden to Germany.<sup>18</sup> Eighteen months later, during the debate on the White Paper on Defence, Labour proposed a motion of censure accusing the



Government of abandoning the League, prejudicing the chances of any future disarmament conference, and inaugurating a new arms race which would ultimately lead to war.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the country, and not just within the ranks of the Labour Party, armaments were condemned for themselves and because they were thought unnecessary due to the League of Nations and the principles for which it stood.

The League itself commanded a great deal of faith in the twenties and early thirties and was the repository of the hope that never again would the better part of a generation be struck down by war. Support for the League of Nations Union, arguably the single most important and influential pressure group affecting British foreign policy during the interwar period, reached its peak in 1935 and united people from every walk of life and from all across the political spectrum, from George Lansbury to Sir Austen Chamberlain.<sup>20</sup> What public opinion did not, however, fully grasp was that there was a possible contradiction between collective security and disarmament, that an unarmed League - or a League the members of which had little military strength - would prove ineffective against an armed aggressor. Thus, the League of Nations Union had once denounced the Manchester Guardian for pointing out that in the last resort support for the League implied war, a rather unpleasant but perfectly correct conclusion.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, most Labour supporters failed to see the illogic, in the autumn of 1935, of clamouring for maximum collective action against Italy while still adamantly opposing any and all measures of rearmament.

That a position is illogical, however, does not mean that it will not be held. And support for both disarmament and collective security through the League was at its height during the summer of 1935 with the publication of the results of the Peace Ballot.<sup>22</sup> This referendum was set afoot in the spring of 1934 by the League of Nations Union and was



eventually conducted by an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives from the Union itself and from thirty-eight other sponsoring bodies, including the Labour and Liberal Parties, the Trades Union Congress, the co-operative movement, churches, peace societies, and women's groups. The Conservatives, long having been divided on the question of support for the League, declined, at the national level, an invitation to be a sponsor, but local organizations were left free to decide their own attitudes. In the event, a minority of Conservative backbenchers supported the Ballot, while others (notably Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary) criticized it severely. As it gained in popularity, and became almost a crusade, Conservative attitudes softened considerably, and many leading Tories eventually did become supporters.

The Peace Ballot itself consisted of five questions. The first asked whether Britain should continue as a member of the League. The next three canvassed support for disarmament. The fifth question was the crucial one:

Do you consider that, if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by

- a) Economic and non-military measures?
- b) If necessary, military measures?

The press were not favourable. Only the Manchester Guardian and News Chronicle, both Liberal, and the Daily Herald, Labour, supported the Ballot. All the other major papers either ignored it as far as possible, as did The Times and the Daily Telegraph, or opposed it, generally because the questions put complicated issues in too simple a form.<sup>23</sup>

Certainly, the Ballot left itself open to much criticism. While it had been intended as a test of opinion on collective security and international disarmament and not as a simple referendum on war and peace, it

tended to take on this latter overtone. It also, as Sir Samuel Hoare noted in his memoirs, ignored the possibility that the possession of armaments might have a deterrent value and thereby help to preserve peace;<sup>24</sup> but the principal flaw, as a high-ranking Conservative publically pointed out at the time, lay in the fifth question, which gave the impression that a nation could impose an economic blockade with the certainty that it would not lead to war. This was simply untrue. It would be impossible to vote 'yes' in part (a) without being ready to do the same in part (b), but this point was not emphasized by the Ballot.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these criticisms, the results of the referendum, announced in June of 1935, were reasonably clear. The responses to the first four questions demonstrated almost unanimous support for the League of Nations and for general disarmament - but not necessarily for unilateral British disarmament, a possibility not explicitly covered. The results for question 5 showed, on the one hand, an equally overwhelming endorsement of collective security by all means short of war (part (a) received 10,027,608 yes votes, 635,075 no votes, and 855,107 abstentions), and, on the other hand, more limited but still majority approval for military sanctions themselves (part (b) received 6,784,368 yes votes, 2,351,981 no votes, and 2,364,441 abstentions).

If the Peace Ballot indicated anything, it was that the country clearly favoured universal disarmament and a foreign policy based on collective security through the League of Nations. The results of the voting were not such as to encourage the Government to proceed full speed with a massive rearmament programme. Instead, they felt constrained to pledge their firm loyalty to Geneva. On 23 July 1935, a deputation headed by Lord Robert Cecil, President of the League of Nations Union and chairman of the ad hoc committee running the Peace

Ballot, spoke about it to Baldwin, Hoare, and Eden. He emphasized the scope and importance of the Ballot and said that it very accurately represented the position in the country. Baldwin replied that

the Government intend to persist in the policy that they have hitherto pursued, and that the League of Nations remains... 'the sheet anchor of British policy'.<sup>26</sup>

### The Electoral Situation

In the autumn of 1931, immediately after the financial crisis had been eased, the National Government called a general election. They fought it as a three-way coalition of Conservatives, National Labour, and National Liberal against Labour and Liberal opposition. The Conservatives, their poll increasing by some three million votes, gained the most; Labour representation dropped considerably; and the Liberals emerged as the biggest losers. The Conservatives ended up with 473 seats, giving the National Government a combined majority of 427.<sup>27</sup> The election had been held in a crisis atmosphere, and the tremendous Tory showing was anomalous and hardly represented long-term feeling in the country. It should not have been surprising, then, that over the next four years the Government were consistently defeated at by-elections. In October of 1933, they lost at East Fulham; and, of the eleven following contests up to the summer of 1934, they were beaten in ten, the swings against them ranging from 16 to 25.2 per cent. Only at Portsmouth were they saved, but even there the swing was 8.8 per cent. Another exception was Twickenham, over the summer; but, from October of 1934 to the following March, the movements against the Government averaged 23.4 per cent.<sup>28</sup> They managed to preserve two seats in March and April but lost another one in July when a Conservative majority of 5,500 gave way to a Labour one almost equally large.<sup>29</sup>



Of all these results, it was East Fulham which affected the Government the most. A 26.5 per cent swing turned a seemingly impregnable Tory majority of 14,521 into a Labour victory of 4,840.<sup>30</sup> Stanley Baldwin's closest friend has left an account of the campaign:

It was at this moment that East Fulham overtook all our calculations. It had been a Conservative-held borough throughout my political career, and in the 1931 election Kenyon Vaughn-Morgan had pushed up his majority to 14,000. When he died in the autumn of 1933 the local Conservatives chose Alderman Waldron to replace him. He was well known locally, had been Mayor of Fulham several times, and was an honorary freeman of the Borough. His opponent was John Wilmot of the ILP, who campaigned chiefly on housing and disarmament. An old friend of mine, Arthur Baker, covered the campaign for The Times and wrote on polling day: 'It would come as no surprise if Labour polled nearly 15,000, so popular have Mr. Wilmot and his peace propaganda proved.' He did rather better than that and won the seat by nearly 5,000 votes. He regarded his victory as 'a message of hope for all who are working for peace.' Poor Waldron was accused of demanding 'armaments and war' and George Lansbury in his message to the electors said, 'I would close every recruiting station, disband the army and dismiss the air force. I would abolish the whole dreadful equipment of war and say to the world "Do your worst".' I have quoted enough I think to show the manner in which the election was fought. Stanley Baldwin was appalled at the result and when Vansittart came to see him to urge the case for speedy rearmament, he told him that he could not afford to take risks. The British public, he knew, would have to be educated to accept that it was necessary. To press on with it at that moment, he thought, would be fatal. It would alienate support from the National Government, and cause it to lose the next election. He knew that the Socialist Government that replaced it would not rearm at all, and he was not prepared to gamble with the security of the country.

Stanley Baldwin was kept well informed of the state of public opinion by Central Office, but the result of East Fulham stunned him so much that he asked for a special report on it to be prepared. Patrick Gower, to whom the task was entrusted, approached Baker and asked him to draft it. It made gloomy reading. East Fulham had been lost purely on the pacifist issue, Baker reported, and I am sure it was these words that were in Stanley Baldwin's mind when, in November 1936, he tried to explain the course of his policy in the years since 1933.<sup>31</sup>

From a considerably different political position, Hugh Dalton, the Labour M.P., gave an alternate and more convincing explanation of the result at East Fulham.<sup>32</sup> Wilmot was neither a pacifist nor an advocate of unilateral disarmament. He owed his victory to four factors: to his support of collective defence through a strong League and a general disarmament treaty; to his exposure of bad housing and his demand for slum clearance and new building; to the superiority of his electoral organization; and to his own personality and outstanding political ability. Wilmot, according to Dalton, was a much more gifted Parliamentary candidate than his opponent.

Dalton's account stands up to reality better than Davidson's. Domestic conditions, not foreign policy, usually determine election results, and mid-term by-elections generally tend to favour the party out of power. Moreover, there was a natural swing back to Labour after the freakish results of 1931. A few days after East Fulham, Labour gained control of 200 boroughs at local elections and the following March captured London County Council - two results presumably unrelated to foreign policy.<sup>33</sup> In fact, one Conservative Minister suspected that the major issue at East Fulham had been not pacifism or disarmament but the means test.<sup>34</sup>

Davidson's interpretation, however wrong, was nonetheless widely held among Conservatives and influenced their future behaviour. Certainly, the result had a serious effect on Stanley Baldwin. He explained his feelings to the House of Commons on 12 November 1936:

You will remember the election at Fulham in the autumn of 1933, when a seat which the National Government held was lost by about 7,000 votes on no issue but the pacifist. You will remember perhaps that the National Government candidate who made a most guarded reference to the question of defence was mobbed for it.



That was the feeling in the country in 1933. My position as the leader of a great party was not altogether a comfortable one. I asked myself what chance was there - when that feeling that was given expression to in Fulham was common throughout the country - what chance was there within the next year or two of that feeling being so changed that the country would give a mandate for rearmament? Supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming and that we must rearm, does anybody think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at that moment? I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, in 1935 as the Italo-Ethiopian conflict unfolded, the Government's perception of the political situation placed yet another brake on rearmament. They knew that it was essential and that its pace must be increased. They also knew that if the Labour Party were to win the next election they would definitely not rearm at all, but they feared that either large scale rearmament or a campaign based on that platform might cost them the election and be a self-defeating move. To ensure their victory at the polls, they not only de-emphasized rearmament but also repeated their pledges of support for collective security and the League of Nations.

Following the collapse of Lloyd George's coalition, all Governments in the twenties

tended to follow rather than to lead public opinion in foreign affairs, to satisfy the immediate desires of the electorate rather than the ultimate interests of the nation, to make foreign policy the prisoner of domestic politics rather than to seek to pursue a farsighted independent course and to carry the public with them step by step.<sup>36</sup>

The attitude of the politicians in power remained the same in the first half of the thirties. They felt their freedom of action to be severely circumscribed by the tenor of public opinion and the climate of electoral politics. The British Government preferred to bow to the



public's wishes rather than to try to lead and re-educate opinion. As a result, when the Italian threat to Ethiopia became manifest, the Government pledged that the League of Nations remained the foundation on which their foreign policy rested.

#### The Government's Dilemma

By the summer of 1935, the British Government confronted a difficult and unpleasant choice. Aware of the dangers from Japan and Germany, worried by the inadequacies of their own defences which for domestic reasons they felt they could not repair far or fast enough, and perturbed by the lack of international aid available to them, they placed a very high value on Italian friendship and the preservation of the Stresa Front. At the same time, they felt that domestic pressures and the cause of international co-operation necessitated that they fully support the League of Nations and the principle of collective security. The Italian threat to Ethiopia brought to the surface the latent incompatibility between the alliance with a revisionist Italy and allegiance to the status quo League. The international situation and their own military weakness tended to make the Government prefer the former; but domestic factors and their unwillingness to risk alienating opinion at home and abroad pushed them towards the latter. The Italo-Ethiopian conflict presented the Government with a dilemma. Their attempts to escape from this dilemma and somehow preserve both Stresa and the League provide the key to understanding and explaining their behaviour during 1935.

# Notes to Chapter Four

1. For the general nature of the domestic environment, see Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, Britain in the Nineteen Thirties; Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, The Long Week-End; C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940; Malcolm Muggeridge, The Thirties; George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier; and A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945.
2. See W.A. Lewis, Economic Survey 1919-1939, chapter V.
3. D. Butler and J. Freeman, British Political Facts 1900-1967, pp. 219-221.
4. Lewis, p. 79.
5. Taylor, English History, p. 412.
6. F.A. Johnson, Defence by Committee, p. 226.
7. DRC 14, the first report of the Defence Requirements Committee, circulated as Cabinet Paper 64(34) on 7 March 1934, and Basil Collier, The Defence of the United Kingdom, p. 27 (see above, p. 83).
8. Collier, pp. 31-34.
9. Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny, p. 101.
10. Quoted from A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War, p. 76.
11. This blinkered editorial attitude of The Times is mentioned by, inter alia, Mowat (p. 536) and Harold Macmillan (Winds of Change, p. 131). In his memoirs (Facing the Dictators, p. 176), Anthony Eden refers to this particular editorial and is scathing in general about the pro-German slant of The Times, which was having a deplorable effect in Europe due to the fact that it was often considered to be the official organ of the Government.
12. Quoted from D.C. Watt, Personalities and Politics, p. 128.
13. Quoted from Gaetano Salvemini, Prelude to World War II, p. 217. That summer an official delegation from the British Legion did indeed go to Germany (Watt, p. 128).
14. Michael Astor, Tribal Feeling, p. 144. The Cliveden Set included Geoffrey Dawson and Robert Barrington-Ward, editor and deputy-editor of The Times.
15. Watt, p. 119.
16. Lord Londonderry was the notable example. By the spring of 1935, he had become involved with a group who were notably pro-German in their sympathies. Consequently, in June, Baldwin removed him from



the position of Air Secretary and kicked him upstairs to be Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords. The following November, Baldwin threw him out of the Cabinet (Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin, p. 805).

17. Macmillan, p. 384.
18. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 746.
19. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 797.
20. Watt, p. 35.
21. Taylor, English History, p. 346.
22. For a general account of the Peace Ballot and the circumstances surrounding it, see Arnold Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs 1935, volume i, pp. 48ff.
23. Taylor, English History, p. 468.
24. Lord Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, p. 128.
25. Letter to Lord Robert Cecil (President of the League of Nations Union, Chairman of the National Declaration Committee which was the ad hoc group running the Peace Ballot, and former Minister of Blockade and Parliamentary Undersecretary at the Foreign Office during the First World War) from Colonel George Herbert, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. This letter was printed in The Times on 24 July 1934.
26. Documents from the Prime Minister's Office, Public Record Office reference number PREM 1/178.
27. Butler and Freeman.
28. Middlemas and Barnes, pp. 744, 764, and 791.
29. The Times, 15 March, 18 April, and 17 July 1935.
30. Mowat, p. 422.
31. Lord Davidson, Memoirs of a Conservative, p. 398. Davidson had been a Conservative M.P., PPS to both Bonar Law and Baldwin, and Chairman from 1926 to 1930 of the Conservative Party organization.
32. Hugh Dalton, The Fateful Years, p. 47. Labour M.P. from 1924 to 1931, he had been Parliamentary Undersecretary at the Foreign Office from 1929 to 1931. Defeated in the election of September 1931, he was re-elected in 1935.
33. Taylor, English History, pp. 453-454.
34. The Minister was Neville Chamberlain. Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain, p. 177.



35. Parliamentary Debates. Official Report. Fifth Series - Volume 317.
36. Gordon A. Craig, 'The British Foreign Office from Grey to Austen Chamberlain', p. 36.

Chapter Five  
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The First Decision Situation:  
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From the Wal Wal Incident to the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia  
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At the beginning of 1935, Ethiopia was one of the very few independent nations left in Africa.<sup>1</sup> It was poor and backward. It possessed little mineral wealth,<sup>2</sup> and the population of roughly seven and a half million scratched out a bare living on the land.<sup>3</sup> Although, the first constitution had been promulgated in 1931 and attempts at modernization had been made, the country remained a feudal kingdom, with government and society elementary and inchoate, and with slavery rife, despite attempts by the Emperor and a relatively progressive minority to stamp it out.<sup>4</sup> Landlocked, Ethiopia was completely surrounded by territory under the control of Britain, France, and Italy, and her main connection to the outside world was by the railway from Addis Ababa to the port of Djibuti in French Somaliland. Much of the periphery of the country, especially in the south and east, was inhospitable scrub and desert inimical to European colonization. The much more temperate and fertile highlands of the north and the centre - Ethiopia proper - were honeycombed by mountains and valleys which provided a formidable obstacle to transportation and communication and thus to centralized political control. All told, the effort required to invade and subjugate Haile Selassie's domains could hardly be worth the end result.

Nevertheless, Ethiopia had in the past aroused a certain amount of great power interest. The events of 1935 were neither the first Italian



invasion of that country nor the first attempts of Britain, France, and Italy to unilaterally decide its fate. In the 1880s, the Italians began to push inland from their Red Sea territory of Eritrea into parts of the Tigré in northern Ethiopia. Unsuccessful in attempts to achieve a protectorate by treaty, they tried to gain one by conquest. They failed. Ethiopia preserved her independence by completely and humiliatingly routing an Italian army at the battle of Adowa in 1896. Nevertheless, encroachments upon her sovereignty continued. In 1906, Britain, France, and Italy, the three limitrophe powers, concluded the Tripartite Agreement which, although the preamble declared their common interest in safeguarding the integrity of Ethiopia, had the effect of delimiting their special interests and spheres of influence.<sup>5</sup> During the First World War, Italy demanded a protectorate over all of Ethiopia as a reward for joining the Entente,<sup>6</sup> and the British Foreign Office actually drafted a plan which would have partitioned that country and given the non-Amharic portions to Italy.<sup>7</sup> Nothing came of these claims and plans. Instead, Italy reversed her position and joined with France in 1923 to sponsor Ethiopian membership in the League of Nations. Despite British objections on the grounds that 'Ethiopia had not reached a state of civilization and internal security sufficient to warrant her admission',<sup>8</sup> she became a member subject to certain conditions regarding the control of slavery and the arms traffic. Two years later, Italy's policy seemed to revert to its original line, when she and Britain exchanged notes reaffirming their spheres of influence and agreeing to support each other's requests for economic concessions. In November of 1925, while on a Mediterranean cruise on his private yacht, Sir Austen Chamberlain, the British Foreign Secretary, put in at Rapallo and renewed his friendship with Mussolini. The following month saw an Anglo-Italian economic agreement on Ethiopia. Britain wished to control

the headwaters of the Blue Nile at its source in Lake Tsana. Italy wanted to construct a railway across Ethiopia which would connect her two East African colonies of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, and also wanted to have economic privileges in the area west of Addis Ababa. In an exchange of notes, Britain and Italy agreed to support each other's claims.<sup>9</sup> The two countries dropped the matter, however, when the French refused to accede to the agreement, and when the Regent, the future Haile Selassie, protested to the League. In 1928, Italian policy seemed to reverse itself once more with the conclusion of a Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration with Ethiopia, which bound the two governments to submit any dispute that could not be settled by normal diplomatic means to a 'procedure of conciliation or arbitration'.<sup>10</sup>

In the spring of 1933, however, the Italian government again turned seriously to the idea of annexing Ethiopia. Emilio de Bono, Minister of Colonies and the future head of the Italian war effort in East Africa, organized a committee within his ministry to study ways and means of asserting Italian influence.<sup>11</sup> He urged Mussolini to act. In the autumn, a press campaign accused Ethiopia of obstructing Italian economic penetration, and Italian diplomats attacked her at the League.<sup>12</sup> In 1934, Mussolini adopted proposals for a military build up in Eritrea, and he told Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor, that he expected war in the near future. American officials in Paris and Addis Ababa believed the same, and the United States ambassador in Rome predicted that Italy would either conquer or gain a protectorate over Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, invasion was by no means decided upon at the end of 1934. It appears that Mussolini was contemplating a campaign to begin in August of 1936 at the end of the rainy season. Moreover, there was significant pressure within Italy against any attempt at annexing Ethiopia. Both Marshall Badoglio, chief of the general staff, and the



King counselled against the project. The former, after having visited the area, was sceptical about the possibility of a successful campaign and reported that conquest might take seven years. He disliked de Bono and distrusted his military judgement, and he opposed the idea of withdrawing troops from the Brenner in the face of German expansion. To these objections the King added that any Italian force in East Africa would be entirely at the mercy of the British, who could easily isolate and destroy it by closing the Suez Canal.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the Italian position was far from certain when, by chance, the Wal Wal incident intervened. Wal Wal was a watering hole located in the Ogaden desert in southeast Ethiopia and clearly marked on most maps, including Italian ones, as being within that country.<sup>15</sup> However, in 1930, a small, but permanent Italian military post had been established there. The Ethiopians never protested to Rome, but neither did they accept the situation.<sup>16</sup> Towards the end of November of 1934, an Anglo-Ethiopian boundary commission, with a relatively large escort of about 600 Ethiopian soldiers arrived on the spot. A confrontation ensued, and the commission withdrew somewhat. The Ethiopian troops did not. Fighting broke out on 5 December and resulted in the death of 107 of the Ethiopians and 45 of the Italian native levy.<sup>17</sup>

Protests were immediately exchanged. An Ethiopian note of 9 December invoked the 1928 Treaty of Friendship and asked for arbitration, a request which Italy rejected five days later on the grounds that Ethiopian responsibility was abundantly obvious. Instead, Italy demanded apologies, reparations, and a salute by an Ethiopian delegation to the Italian flag at Wal Wal, in effect recognition of Italian sovereignty. In response, on 14 December, Ethiopia appealed for the first of many times to the League of Nations.<sup>18</sup>



During the next several months, while the League dithered and accomplished nothing, Italy prepared for war. Reserves were mobilized, and a steady stream of men and materiel was shipped to the two Italian colonies in East Africa. Between the end of January and the middle of July, 82,000 soldiers moved through Suez,<sup>19</sup> and during the first six months of the year 102 Italian naval vessels sailed through the canal - as compared with three for the corresponding period in 1934.<sup>20</sup> These preparations placed a heavy strain on the Italian economy. Already by the end of April, the cost of 'exigencies' in East Africa amounted to £10 million,<sup>21</sup> and at the end of July Italy's economic condition was extremely depressed. The state of the public finances was bad; the lira had been de facto devalued; and Italian stocks were everywhere falling in value.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, preparations for war continued. At the same time, the officially controlled press waged intensive propaganda campaigns with the object of rallying domestic opinion in support of this adventure, which was far from being generally popular.<sup>23</sup>

While these military preparations were being made, Mussolini was also attempting to clear the way diplomatically. In January, the Laval-Mussolini talks settled all outstanding issues between France and Italy, and the French leader ceded Mussolini a free hand economically in Ethiopia. The latter claimed, however, that the accords reached at that time, as well as the abortive 1925 Anglo-Italian agreement, conceded him complete freedom, political in addition to economic: a blank cheque for turning Ethiopia into an Italian colony.<sup>24</sup> At the end of the month, the Italian government conveyed their version of the Laval-Mussolini conversations to the British and suggested that they would like to exchange views 'on the respective interests of both Governments in Ethiopia and to explore the possibility of the development of such interests in a mutually harmonious manner'.<sup>25</sup> Sir John Simon, Foreign Secretary at the

time, took good care not to reply to this démarche. Nevertheless, Mussolini tried again, this time at Stresa in April, to get an Anglo-French go ahead to conquer Ethiopia. The subject was not on the agenda and was never discussed by the leaders, all of whom had good reasons for ignoring it. Yet, there was some confirmation for Mussolini of Laval's 'free hand'. To a document that originally read 'to preserve the peace', the Duce specifically added, with what was a particularly pregnant pause, the words 'of Europe'. Neither the British nor the French objected, Sir John Simon remaining immobile and ignoring the looks of both Ramsay MacDonald and Vansittart, and Mussolini later claimed that this addition had been intended to indicate the omission of the Ethiopian situation.<sup>26</sup> He wanted Anglo-French permission for his projected conquest of Ethiopia.

The Wal Wal incident had been merely a local flare up unconnected with any grand design, but the Italian government fastened upon it as a pretext for setting into motion their plans for colonizing Ethiopia. Several reasons, having little to do with the justification given at the time, existed for this Italian adventure. Italy had no need whatsoever for Ethiopia: to conquer and control her would be a drain not a benefit. The real reasons were somewhat different. Most important was the domestic failure of fascism. With the economy suffering badly, Mussolini needed a success, and the conquest of Ethiopia would serve to distract attention from internal conditions, to boost Italy's prestige as a great power, and to avenge the humiliation of Adowa. Furthermore, Ethiopia was convenient. It adjoined Italy's East African colonies and was the only unconquered part of the world available for colonial expansion. Finally, there may also have been a desire on the Duce's part to outshine that other dictator on the far side of the Alps.<sup>27</sup> In these circumstances, Wal Wal served as the trigger which set Italy firmly on the course of conquest. In February, Mussolini wrote to de Bono, who the previous



month had been appointed High Commissioner for Eritrea and Somaliland,<sup>28</sup> that it was his 'profound conviction' that military operations would begin some time in October;<sup>29</sup> in June, the Italian press were proclaiming the inevitability of war; and on 6 July, in a public speech, Mussolini announced that 'we have entered upon a struggle which we as a Government and a revolutionary people have irrevocably decided to carry to its conclusion'.<sup>30</sup> By the summer, Italian preparations and pronouncements left little doubt about the inevitability of invasion.

As Italy made ready for war, British public opinion grew increasingly concerned about the situation and adopted an anti-Italian outlook. The changing editorial position of The Times illustrates the progress of both of these trends. On 12 January, it speculated that 'the obvious desire of both Governments for a friendly understanding encourages the hope that direct negotiations will be successful', and exactly a month later it still felt that it was too soon to assume that Italian actions were more than precautionary and defensive. By 6 March, however, The Times was hoping that the appearances of preparing for war were misleading, and two months later on 16 May it said that 'the original incident between Italy and Ethiopia does not for a moment warrant the dimensions which the dispute between the two has now assumed or the warlike preparations which are being made by both sides, especially by Italy'. A note of optimism crept in at the end of May when the Council of the League of Nations ordered an arbitration commission to convene, but by 5 July it was feared that 'the issue of peace or war is at stake and of the whole future of the League'. Three days later, after Mussolini's speech of 6 July, it was concluded that there was no more room for doubt about his intentions. Finally, on 26 September, on the eve of



the invasion and just after the Duce's rejection of the latest peace proposals, The Times stated flatly that Italy was completely in the wrong over her projected resort to force.

By the end of the summer, British opinion of all hues firmly supported action through the League against any Italian aggression. On the left, both the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party overwhelmingly passed resolutions condemning Italian threats and calling upon the Government fully to support the League.<sup>31</sup> In the middle, the letters to The Times provoked the editor to comment upon how stirred up and anxious British public opinion had become over Mussolini's actions and words.<sup>32</sup> On the right, both Churchill and Sir Austen Chamberlain supported the League.<sup>33</sup> A few voices did exist on the opposite side,<sup>34</sup> but the majority of public opinion from all parts of the political spectrum wished the Government to oppose Italy and stand by the Covenant.

As the public took an increasingly grave view of the situation, so did the Government. Initially, however, only the Foreign Office understood the potentially serious nature of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. As early as January, Sir John Simon told one of his officials that the Italians fully intended to conquer Ethiopia.<sup>35</sup> The following month, Sir Sidney Barton, British Minister in Addis Ababa, cabled to London that the independence of Ethiopia was the real issue at stake,<sup>36</sup> and Sir Eric Drummond, the Ambassador in Rome, warned Mussolini of the possible adverse reaction that his present policy would have on both British public opinion and Anglo-Italian relations.<sup>37</sup> The Foreign Office were concerned enough that Simon appointed at the beginning of

March an interdepartmental committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Maffey to thoroughly examine British interests in Ethiopia in the light of the tension in the area.

Not until May, however, did the Cabinet consider the problem. In March and April, Ministers had been too preoccupied with the German announcements of rearmament and of the denunciation of Versailles, with Stresa, and with Simon's upcoming trip to Berlin. At their meeting on 15 May, Ministers for the first time looked at the Italo-Ethiopian conflict in detail.<sup>38</sup> In a quite extensive, rather pessimistic, and remarkably accurate appraisal of the situation, Simon traced the developments from Wal Wal to the current moment and left little doubt that Italy would invade in October at the end of the rainy season. He predicted, as a result, the collapse of both the Stresa Front and the League, an Italy much weaker in Europe, and German glee at this turn of events. Italy, he thought, would no more accept an adverse decision from the League than Japan had over Manchuria.<sup>39</sup> Two days later at another Cabinet, Drummond, specially recalled from Rome for information and as a warning to the Italians that the Government did not view the situation lightly, presented a less pessimistic opinion. He thought that within two months Mussolini might be willing to find a way out provided he could save face. To achieve this, though, Drummond felt that Ethiopia would have to be pressed into conceding economic advantages to Italy.<sup>40</sup>

At these two meetings, the dual line which the Government was later to adopt began to take shape. Drummond felt that it was useless to proceed on the basis of the Covenant of the League; he thought it better to use the Tripartite Treaty of 1906. 'He was convinced that at some point pressure would have to be put on the Emperor of Ethiopia to afford some economic advantages to Italy.' Various Government departments had for some time been considering the idea of ceding to Ethiopia the port



of Zeila in British Somaliland in exchange for improvements in the frontier between the colony and Ethiopia. In Simon's memorandum to the Cabinet, the Foreign Office had modified this idea to suggest that in return for Zeila Ethiopia would grant concessions to Italy. Ministers decided, however, that this proposal 'should be reserved, though it might be useful later on if Signor Mussolini should himself show any disposition of a desire to reach a settlement'. They preferred, for the moment, to try the other line of policy and to attempt to avoid a conflict by means of conciliation at Geneva. They felt that unless they took the initiative the question would be postponed until September, at which time the rainy season would have ended and hostilities would be imminent if they had not already begun. Consequently, Drummond was instructed that, while informing Mussolini of the importance of Stresa, he must make clear to the Italian leader that the Government's avowed policy, from which they could not depart, was to go along with the deep feelings existing in the country in favour of support for the peaceful settlement of disputes under the League, and to further state that the Council would not ignore the matter until September. The Cabinet, having decided that the issue must be brought up at Geneva, instructed Anthony Eden, Britain's representative to the League and present at both meetings though not a member of the Cabinet, to raise it, and they gave him 'wide discretion' to prevent the outbreak of war. At this point, Ministers, aware of and concerned by the problem, discounted Simon's pessimism and still hoped that the dispute might be peacefully settled through the offices of the League of Nations.

To try to achieve this end, Eden set off for Geneva and the regular session of the Council scheduled for the end of May.<sup>41</sup> To date, the League had done nothing. The initial Ethiopian appeals in December and January had been met by the endeavours of Laval and Eden to keep the



issue off the agenda and instead to get the two parties to sit down to direct negotiations. On 15 January, Ethiopia had formally requested that the dispute be put on the agenda. The result had been that Italy had modified her demands and agreed to negotiations, and consequently the Council had decided to postpone any discussion until its next session. Up to mid-March, Italy had continued to delay, refusing to set up the arbitration commission, while continuing her military build up. On 17 March, Ethiopia had once more appealed to the Council and pledged herself to accept any arbitration decision. However, the concurrent developments in Germany had overshadowed this matter, and neither Paris nor London had wished to see it discussed at the League. An Italian note of 22 March had provided an excuse by finally agreeing to an arbitration commission, and the Council had again postponed any discussion until its next regular session in May. At the extraordinary meeting held in April following Stresa, Laval and Simon had once more kept the issue off the agenda. Such had been the lack of progress and the general stalling tactics when Eden arrived at Geneva in May with instructions to raise the subject. After several days of private talks, he and Laval arrived at a procedure for the future. Italy acknowledged the League's standing in the dispute and accepted arbitration, but refused to promise the suspension of her military preparations. The Council set two time limits: 25 July for the constitution of the arbitration commission and 25 August for a settlement. If either date was missed, the Council would meet to consider what further steps ought to be taken. For the first time, the League of Nations had actually set a deadline, but Italy had still managed to gain more time and had not had to halt her military activities. Meanwhile, the end of the rainy season was getting closer.

Such was the general situation when on 7 June the British Government reconstituted itself. Stanley Baldwin, leader of the Conservative Party and the dominant figure in the National Government, finally became Prime Minister in place of the ailing Ramsay MacDonald. Sir John Simon moved to the Home Office and was replaced at the Foreign Office by Sir Samuel Hoare who came over from the India Office. Entering the Cabinet as Minister for League of Nations Affairs and joining Hoare as, in effect, a second Foreign Secretary was Anthony Eden. The new Cabinet contained twenty-two Ministers:

Prime Minister	Stanley Baldwin
Lord Chancellor	Viscount Hailsham
Lord President	Ramsay MacDonald
Lord Privy Seal	Marquess of Londonderry
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Neville Chamberlain
Home Secretary	Sir John Simon
Foreign Secretary	Sir Samuel Hoare
Colonial Secretary	Malcolm MacDonald
Dominions Secretary	J.H. Thomas
Secretary for War	Viscount Halifax
Secretary for India	Marquess of Zetland
Secretary for Air	Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister
Secretary for Scotland	Sir Godfrey Collins
First Lord of the Admiralty	Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell
President of the Board of Trade	Walter Runciman
Minister of Agriculture	Walter Elliot
President of the Board of Education	Oliver Stanley
Minister of Labour	Ernest Brown



Minister of Health	Sir Kingsley Wood
First Commissioner of Works	William Ormsby-Gore
Minister for League of Nations Affairs	Anthony Eden
Minister without Portfolio	Lord Eustace Percy

These men, along with a very few others, were in the position to influence the crucial decisions of the next several months. For most of them, as for Alfred Duff Cooper, who became Secretary of War in November, Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the Cabinet and eminence grise, Sir Austen Chamberlain, former Foreign Secretary and elder statesman of the Conservative Party, and Geoffrey Dawson, editor of The Times, capsule biographies have been provided in Appendix I. But for Stanley Baldwin, unquestionably the dominant figure in the Government, and for the three leading individuals at the Foreign Office, Hoare, Vansittart, and Eden, some greater detail about their personalities, beliefs, and policies is necessary.

Stanley Baldwin (1867-1947),<sup>42</sup> the only son of Alfred and Louisa Baldwin, was born in Bewdly in Worcestershire into the upper middle class. He was educated at Harrow and Trinity College Cambridge, where he managed a third in the historical tripos of 1888. Though he had felt a vague calling for the Church, he eventually entered the family firm, an ironworks, where he was content for the next twenty years to remain second-in-command to his father.

In 1908, aged 41, he succeeded his father, on the latter's death, as Member of Parliament for Bewdley, a seat he held until his elevation to the Lords in 1937. Prior to the war, he made only six full speeches, but in 1916 he became Parliamentary Private Secretary to Bonar Law and began his meteoric rise to power. In June of 1917, he was appointed



Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and in March of 1921 he entered the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade. Appalled by the 'morally repugnant' atmosphere of Lloyd George's Government,<sup>43</sup> he led the revolt, in October of 1922, that culminated in the famous Conservative Party meeting at the Carlton Club, the consequent destruction of the Coalition, and the exile of Lloyd George into the political wilderness from where he was never to return. Overnight, Baldwin became a major leader among the Tories and was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Government of Bonar Law. The following spring, he succeeded the latter as Prime Minister. His rise to the top had been astonishing and unprecedented,<sup>44</sup> amazing even himself.<sup>45</sup> Once in power, he stayed there, three times Prime Minister (1923-1924, 1924-1929, and 1935-1937) and the 'ruling force in British politics' until his retirement and peerage in 1937.<sup>46</sup>

Baldwin was far from being the simple English pig farmer in which guise he sometimes depicted himself. Highly strung and suffering from the same nervous disability as his father, he also inherited, from his mother's side of the family, the temperament of an artist - not that of a scientist or a man of affairs. His cousin, Rudyard Kipling, thought that he was the best writer in the family;<sup>47</sup> both Hoare and Halifax referred to the 'romantic streak' in his makeup;<sup>48</sup> and Lloyd George once said of him that 'Baldwin is one of us; he is a Celt at heart and that is why so many of you find him difficult to understand'.<sup>49</sup> The British people as a whole trusted Baldwin; to them he seemed to embody all that was good and solid and decent about England, particularly the countryside. And Baldwin merited this trust. He felt a deep duty and devotion to his homeland, having, for example, in 1919 anonymously donated £120,000 (a fifth of his fortune) towards the payment of war debt; and, to a great extent, he succeeded in achieving, at least in political life,

what he once said was his abiding ambition, 'to prevent the class war becoming a reality'.<sup>50</sup> In temperament, Stanley Baldwin was lazy and indolent, seldom reading the newspapers and not interested in the details of government. He cared about people, not policies,<sup>51</sup> and one of his strengths lay in his ability both to sense and to create moods and feelings; his greatest gift, he believed, was his understanding of the people of England. The second of his strengths was his ability to rise to the occasion.<sup>52</sup> Though at bottom lethargic, nevertheless, as the General Strike and the Abdication demonstrated, he was at his best in time of crisis. During Munich, he told a friend, 'I should have done it very differently... I love a crisis'.<sup>53</sup> Simple on the surface, Baldwin's character contained tremendous complexities and powers.

His political style reflected his personality. 'When it came to the question of what the Prime Minister should do, the trouble was that he neither wished to do anything in particular nor, indeed, believed that there was anything to be done that really mattered. Sooner or later, if the need for a policy or a measure was great enough, the public would have it.'<sup>54</sup> Once, at the general election of 1923, Baldwin tried to lead opinion, that time in favour of protection. He lost the election and never again tried to run ahead of the feelings of the country.<sup>55</sup> As Prime Minister, he picked his Ministers with care and then let them get on unhindered with their jobs; his style closely paralleled that of Disraeli and was actually copied by Harold Macmillan. Nevertheless, despite his apparent laxity, Baldwin remained the absolute master of his Cabinet, easily accessible to his colleagues, who knew that his support on contentious issues would be decisive. In a similar fashion, he exerted his control over the House of Commons, spending a considerable amount of time there and superb in understanding and moulding its atmosphere.<sup>56</sup> He was also the most brilliant and, if necessary, ruthless



politician of his day: not only, according to Churchill, the greatest party manager the Conservatives ever had,<sup>57</sup> but also unrivalled in his skill for personal political infighting. He took on and defeated all the giants of the period. He beat the press Lords, Beaverbrook and Rothermere, when they tried to oust him from power; he destroyed the Coalition and Lloyd George; he won out over Lord Curzon in the succession to Bonar Law; he kept Neville Chamberlain in thrall and avoided any challenge to his position; and he tamed the great men in his party, Austen Chamberlain, Birkenhead, and Churchill. In Beaverbrook's words: 'He always won - he always beat me - the toughest and most unscrupulous politician you could find - cold, merciless in his dislikes'.<sup>58</sup>

Baldwin's greatest weakness lay in the field of foreign affairs. He certainly held pronounced views on international relations. He hated bolshevism but, unlike many others in England, did not therefore have any liking for Germany; and, having read Mein Kampf, he was well aware of the nazi menace. He spoke French and, in so far as he ever liked or felt comfortable with foreigners, was pro-French; but he was horrified at the moral corruption in French politics and placed little faith either in their methods of keeping the peace or in their likely strength in the event of war.<sup>59</sup> He also had a fear of aerial bombing so intense as to verge on the obsessive; he vastly overrated, as was relatively common at the time, the value of air power. In the thirties, he fully realized Britain's military weakness and the importance of rearming. Baldwin placed little faith in the League of Nations, a sentiment confirmed by the Manchurian crisis which convinced him both that economic sanctions would almost inevitably lead to war and that the support of the United States was critical to Britain and the League.<sup>60</sup> Already in 1923, he had settled Britain's war debt to the United States - on terms



that almost caused Bonar Law to resign<sup>61</sup> - in order to establish cordial relations with the Americans; and on 23 November 1935 to a Conservative meeting in Glasgow, he said:

It is curious that there is growing among the Labour Party support for what is called a collective peace system. A collective peace system, in my view, is perfectly impracticable in view of the fact today that the United States is not yet, to our unbounded regret, a member of the League of Nations and that in the last two or three years two great powers, Germany and Japan, have both retired from it. It is hardly worth considering when those be the facts. A collective peace system would never be undertaken without those countries. Of that I am certain, and, so long as I have any responsibility in a Government for deciding whether or not this country shall join in a collective peace system, I will say this: never as an individual will I sanction the British Navy being used for an armed blockade of any country in the world until I know what the United States of America is going to do.<sup>62</sup>

Though hardly a master of diplomacy, nor at ease with foreigners, nor well-versed in the details of foreign policy, Baldwin was aware of and concerned by the overall situation. His weakness lay elsewhere. It was a matter of style and, ironically, stemmed from what, in other contexts, were two of his strengths. In the first place, he was content to let his Foreign Secretary proceed as the latter thought best; this policy, successful in the twenties with Austen Chamberlain, was to have unfortunate results in 1935 with Sam Hoare. Second, and perhaps more important, was Baldwin's sensitivity to and refusal to outrun public opinion. In the first half of the thirties in general, and during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict in particular, this was to have disastrous consequences.

The foreign policy of Baldwin's third Government was conducted by a Foreign Office in which responsibility was unhappily divided between Sir Samuel Hoare, Foreign Secretary, and Anthony Eden, Minister for League of Nations Affairs.<sup>63</sup> Behind the two of them was the dynamic Permanent Undersecretary, Sir Robert Vansittart.

Samuel Hoare (1880-1959) describes himself as 'having been brought up in a typical Victorian family, whose traditions had for many generations been Quaker, Evangelical, and family banking'.<sup>64</sup> Educated first at Harrow and then at New College Oxford, he took double firsts in classical honour moderations and modern history. He entered Parliament in 1910 for Chelsea, the constituency he represented until 1944 when he became Viscount Templewood. During the war, he served as a general staff officer, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, in the military missions to Russia, 1916-1917, and Italy, 1917-1918. Just after the catastrophe at Caporetto, Hoare became worried about the war-weariness in Italy and was put in touch with Mussolini, then editing Avanti, the socialist newspaper in Milan. Through an intermediary, the future Italian leader replied, 'I will mobilize the mutilati [bands of toughs] in Milan, and they will break the heads of any pacifists who try to hold anti-war meetings in the street'.<sup>65</sup> Mussolini fulfilled his promise and in later years, when he met Hoare, reminded the latter of their work together. During Hoare's tenure at the Foreign Office, he wrote personal letters to Mussolini, mentioning this co-operation and hoping that it might have some effect on the present: 'Perhaps, also, I somewhat lightly flattered myself with the feeling that my past associations with the Duce might still have some effect on him'.<sup>66</sup> After the war, Hoare was one of those who opposed conciliating Germany.<sup>67</sup> He returned to Parliament, played an important supporting role in Baldwin's destruction of the Coalition,<sup>68</sup> and became Air Secretary in Bonar Law's Government, a position he continued to hold, except for the Labour interlude of 1924, until 1929. In 1931, upon the formation of the National Government, Hoare went to the India Office where, for a period of almost four years, he worked himself to a frazzle on the politically most contentious issue of the period: Indian independence. In the face of fierce opposition from



Churchill, and showing a superb command of detail, he piloted the Government of India Bill successfully through the House of Commons. In doing so, he earned the respect of the country and his colleagues. He was not, however, well liked. Harold Macmillan's judgement is fair: 'Sam Hoare conducted the Indian negotiations with precision and skill. But he was not a favourite of the party or the House. He was too prim - too old-maidish'.<sup>69</sup> The general impression he gave was one of humourlessness and lack of warmth.

In June, Hoare moved from the India Office to the Foreign Office. His reputation stood high, and Baldwin, though not personally close to him, had every reason to be confident in Hoare's abilities, especially as he was an expert on central Europe. Nevertheless, the appointment was not a happy one, partly because in his years at the India Office he had been so overworked that he had little time to pay close attention to foreign policy but primarily because his health rendered him incapable of the task. He was physically weak, mentally tired, subject to fainting spells, and by the beginning of August almost immobile from arthritis in his leg.<sup>70</sup>

Hoare's Cabinet colleague at the Foreign Office was Anthony Eden. Born in 1898 and educated at Eton and Christ Church Oxford, he served with distinction as a Captain in the war, earning the Military Cross. He finally received his B.A. in 1922, with a first in oriental languages, and entered Parliament the following year, at the age of 26, in a by-election at Warwick and Leamington, which he represented until 1957. From 1926 to 1929, he was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Austen Chamberlain, the Foreign Secretary. In 1931, he became Parliamentary Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, and on New Year's Day 1934 he was appointed Lord Privy Seal, though not in the Cabinet, with the same duties as before.



In these years as a junior Minister at the Foreign Office, Eden became widely popular in the country and much liked by the Labour and Liberal opposition.<sup>71</sup> In the performance of his official duties, he spent a considerable amount of time at Geneva, and he became associated with the League of Nations and with attempts to make disarmament and collective security work. Eden was as aware of the German threat and the necessity to rearm as anyone, but he held somewhat different attitudes to Geneva and to foreign policy in 1935 than either Hoare or Vansittart, placing greater faith in the League and less value on the Stresa Front than the other two. Sir Henry Channon's evaluation of him, written in December of 1935 upon his becoming Foreign Secretary, though somewhat acid, is not entirely lacking in point: 'Anthony Eden has been appointed Foreign Secretary by Mr. Baldwin. His appointment is a victory for "The Left", for the pro-Leaguers. He has had a meteoric rise, young Anthony. I knew him well at Oxford, when he was mild, aesthetic, handsome, cultivated and interested in the East - now at thirty-eight he is Foreign Secretary. There is hardly a parallel in our history. I wish him luck; I like him; but I have never had an exaggerated opinion of his brilliance, though his appearance is magnificent'.<sup>72</sup>

The third of the leading figures at the Foreign Office was the Permanent Undersecretary, Sir Robert Vansittart (1881-1957).<sup>73</sup> Born into a distinguished family, he was educated at Eton where he was a fine athlete and an excellent scholar, specializing in languages and winning prizes in both German and French. After public school, he travelled in Germany and France and then turned seriously to preparing himself for the diplomatic examination. Successful, he was posted to Paris in 1903, Tehran in 1907, and Cairo in 1909. In 1911, he returned to the Foreign Office in London, becoming in 1920 an Assistant Secretary. From that point until 1924, he was private secretary to the Foreign Secretary.

In 1928, he became private secretary to the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, with whom he established a close personal friendship, though his influence declined in the 1930s. Vansittart continued in the same position under Ramsay MacDonald until, at the beginning of 1930, he was appointed Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office. He remained in that position until 1938 when he was promoted out of power to the specially created post of chief diplomatic adviser to the Government. Vansittart was a brilliant, quick-thinking, multi-talented man. A poet and a playwright as well as a diplomat, he had once had, while posted in France, a play of his, written and produced in French, performed on the Paris stage. In office, 'he never dithered, nor did he ever fear responsibility'.<sup>74</sup> His intelligence and forceful personality led to his dominating the Foreign Office, and his policies were greatly affected by his anti-German attitudes. He was a fervent francophile and a rabid germanophobe, his hatred of Germany being extreme - though events hardly proved him wrong.

Unfortunately, the three leading figures at the Foreign Office were not in agreement on how to deal with the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. Hoare and Vansittart emphasized, in the face of British military weakness, the importance of preserving the Anglo-French-Italian entente. Upon taking office, Hoare felt that rearmament was absolutely crucial but that the Government would not pursue it, because their electoral mandate was for economic reconstruction, because of the pacifist, pro-League of Nations, and pro-disarmament mood of the public, and because of the widespread pro-German, anti-French feelings. He wrote that 'a consistent policy was impossible without power behind it, and there was no chance for at least three years of any rearmament programme giving us the military force that we needed'.<sup>75</sup> Under these circumstances, Hoare immediately fell in line with Vansittart's ideas:

From the first moment, I came under the influence of his singleness of purpose. His creed was short and undeviating. He firmly believed in the reports of Hitler's aggressive plans, he was certain that the only method of blocking them was by British rearmament, and that as British rearmament would take years to complete, the immediate need was to gain time and strengthen the allied front.<sup>76</sup>

For Hoare and Vansittart, strengthening the allied front meant preserving Anglo-French-Italian unity. The Stresa Front was an essential aspect of their policy to contain Germany. Anthony Eden, on the other hand, while equally aware of the German threat, believed much more strongly in the value of the League of Nations and felt that the potentially high cost of saving Stresa could turn out to be counterproductive. As he later wrote:

-Vansittart held decided views on international affairs and his instincts were usually right, but his sense of the political methods that could be used was sometimes at fault. For instance, he clearly saw the growing military power and political ambition of Nazi Germany as the principal danger. To meet this he was determined to keep the rest of Europe in line against Germany, and would pay almost any price to do so. He did not discern that to appease Mussolini beyond a certain point in Abyssinia must break up the alignment which Italy was intended to strengthen.<sup>77</sup>

Hoare and Eden held fundamentally different attitudes. In the context of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, the former emphasized the importance of preserving the Stresa Front, but the latter felt it essential not to appease Mussolini too far and instead to stand firmly against aggression and in support of the League of Nations and its principles. Already in May, the Foreign Office and the Cabinet had launched British policy on its dual line. The appointment of two Cabinet Ministers at the Foreign Office, each one preferring a different aspect of that dualism, ensured the continuation of this double line and almost inevitably led to incompatibilities between its two aspects. In Baldwin's



new Government, the dual line became a matter of bureaucracy and personality as well as one of well- or ill-considered policy. The structure of the British decision-making system - the divided responsibility at the Foreign Office - in combination with the conflicting views of the two Ministers there ensured that the British Government would attempt to balance between the Stresa Front and the League of Nations.

For the next few months, four men held primary responsibility for the course of British foreign policy. The Cabinet as a whole debated the issues in detail, and many Ministers played important roles; but Hoare, Eden, and Vansittart made and directed policy. And behind them was Stanley Baldwin, master politician and the one man who ultimately ran Cabinet, Parliament, and country.

At the beginning of June, during his first days in office, Hoare conducted several conversations, some alone with Vansittart, some including Eden as well, on the subject of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. They decided that Eden should go to Rome and present Mussolini with the Zeila proposals which Simon had recommended in his memorandum of the previous May. Drummond, when asked for advice, agreed, feeling that the Italian leader might interpret this approach favourably.<sup>78</sup>

When the new Cabinet met on 19 June, Hoare described the situation.<sup>79</sup> It had deteriorated considerably, he said, since Drummond's appreciation in May. Mussolini's enthusiasm had not waned, and Italian public opinion had grown to accept the inevitability of an invasion. Moreover, the French were showing every indication that they would support Italy and not the League. Ministers, impressed with the seriousness of the situation and with the need to demonstrate to domestic and world opinion

that they were doing something 'to avoid a catastrophe', decided that the only way to persuade Mussolini not to invade Ethiopia would be to take some action at once, and they authorized Eden to proceed in the manner already agreed to by himself, Hoare, and Vansittart.

Thus, at the end of June, Anthony Eden travelled to Rome with the first specific plan for a compromise solution to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. He proposed that, in return for the port of Zeila, Ethiopia would cede to Italy part of the arid, semi-scrub land of the Ogaden adjoining the Italian colony of Somaliland, and he added that Britain would be willing to aid Italy in obtaining economic concessions from Haile Selassie. Mussolini knew the details of the British offer in advance, not only because they had been leaked to the press but also because he was privy to all the diplomatic documents which passed through the British Embassy in Rome. This situation hardly facilitated British diplomacy or attempts at peace, especially as the Italians had purloined a copy of the Maffey Report which concluded that Britain's material interests in the area would in no way be affected by an Italian occupation of Ethiopia. Whether or not this foreknowledge made any difference, Mussolini rejected Eden's terms out of hand and stated that he would not settle for anything less than all the non-Amharic portions of Ethiopia, that is the entire country except the central plateau which could remain under Ethiopian sovereignty as long as it was placed under Italian control. The alternative, he continued, was war and a complete conquest.<sup>80</sup>

Having achieved nothing in Rome, Eden returned to London via Paris. In the French capital, he gained the impression from talking to Laval that the latter was playing a complex double game trying to satisfy both Britain and Italy and hoping that some solution would somehow materialize.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Sir George Clerk, the British Ambassador, reported that it was



unlikely that the French Premier would support any policy entailing placing pressure on Mussolini.<sup>82</sup> When the Cabinet met on 3 July, they were apprehensive about this apparent lack of French co-operation and about the consequences that might arise in the event of economic sanctions eventually being imposed on Italy.<sup>83</sup> At their next meeting on 10 July, Ministers learned that the arbitration commission which the League had set up in May had broken up in deadlock.<sup>84</sup> For the next two weeks they temporized, waiting upon events; but finally on 24 July, with the League shortly to meet, they agreed that Hoare should attempt to pressure the French to co-operate in inducing Mussolini to modify his attitude and that Eden should pursue the same policy at the League. One line having failed at Rome, the other was now to be tried at Geneva.<sup>85</sup>

The Council met on 31 July. All the delegates were waiting and willing to follow the British lead, but the result was substantially another delay. Ethiopia agreed not to debate the ownership of Wal Wal, and Italy acquiesced to the appointment of a fifth, neutral arbitrator. The arbitration commission was ordered to report by 4 September, on which date the Council would meet again, regardless of any progress or lack thereof, to examine the situation. The Council also authorized another attempt by Britain, France, and Italy to discuss some basis for a compromise. Ethiopia was excluded from these talks, but the British and French promised to keep her informed and to take no decision without her consent.<sup>86</sup>

These Tripartite talks, as they were called, began in Paris in the middle of August.<sup>87</sup> To determine the British line, Baldwin, Hoare, Eden, Vansittart, and Hankey met on 6 August (by this time Parliament was in recess, Ministers on vacation, and a Cabinet could not easily be held).<sup>88</sup> It was decided that Eden and Vansittart should go to Paris,



there to work closely with the French and in preliminary discussions with them to establish a programme which would bring home to the Italians that they had two choices: either to accept limited concessions from Ethiopia or to bring upon themselves action from the League. This position did not please Laval, but he agreed and in the actual discussions loyally supported his English colleagues. The suggested compromise admitted the Italian need for expansion and raw materials, and recognized the preponderant interests of Italy in Ethiopia. Laval recommended, for example, economic concessions, the appointment of Italian technical advisers, and the granting of rights of settlement in certain areas. The way was also left open for some exchange of territory along the lines of Eden's previous offer in June. The Anglo-French proposals were tabled on 16 August. Two days later, Aloisi, the Italian representative, rejected them.<sup>89</sup> Mussolini still wanted the same demands he had made to Eden a month and a half previously. The conference adjourned indefinitely.

Before he left Paris, Eden sent a secret despatch to Hoare. He noted that British military preparations against a possible attack in the Mediterranean were weak and that either Ministers must rectify this quickly on their own initiative or else a special meeting must be called before the end of the month (the Cabinet were not scheduled to meet next until 23 September).<sup>90</sup> Hoare, who had heard rumours from several sources that Mussolini was planning what was called a 'mad dog' act against the British fleet and Malta, agreed and asked Eden to telephone Baldwin, vacationing as usual at Aix-les-Bains, to arrange it.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the Cabinet were summoned for an emergency session on 22 August.

Four days before the meeting, in a letter to Neville Chamberlain, Hoare wrote that

it is urgently necessary for the Cabinet to consider what in these circumstances our attitude should be on two assumptions: (1) that the French are completely with us, (2) that the French have backed out. It is equally urgent for the Cabinet to consider what preparations should be made to meet a possible mad dog act by the Italians.... Our line, I am sure, is to keep in step with the French, and, whether now or at Geneva, to act with them.<sup>92</sup>

Then, in the two days prior to the Cabinet meeting, Hoare talked to some of the political leaders outside of the Government. Austen Chamberlain warned that the British public would not be satisfied with a policy of inaction or despair. Herbert Samuel, the Liberal leader, noted that there were two conditions necessary for any economic action: it must be collective and involve full Anglo-French co-operation. Lloyd George, like Chamberlain, emphasized that League procedures must be tried out and that this intention must be impressed upon the French, especially Laval who must be left in no doubt about Britain's willingness to play her part. Lansbury, not yet replaced by Attlee as the Labour leader, also stated that the League must be tried - even at the risk of failure. He added that he was anxious to help the Government, as long as they stuck to the Covenant. Lord Robert Cecil said that the League of Nations Union would also support efforts to carry out the Covenant. Finally, Churchill spoke his piece. He pressed, as befitted a former and future First Lord of the Admiralty, for reinforcement of the Mediterranean fleet, and he advocated collective action. He warned that the collapse of the League would drastically weaken the anti-German front in the future.<sup>93</sup> While Hoare's own words reveal his preference for following the French - and consequently for preserving

the Stresa Front - Parliamentary and public opinion, as well as Anthony Eden, were pushing for Britain to support the League of Nations and to take the lead at Geneva.

On 22 August, in the middle of the 'silly season', the Cabinet convened for one of the two most important meetings held on the subject of Ethiopia.<sup>94</sup> Ministers considered a great deal of information, discussed the entire situation in detail, and determined the official policy which was to be followed right up to their meeting on 2 December, on the eve of Sir Samuel Hoare's trip to Paris.

For the first time, the Cabinet looked at the Maffey Report. Written from 'the narrow standpoint of British material interests in and near Ethiopia', it concluded that, while it would be preferable were Ethiopia to retain her independence, an Italian conquest would only slightly threaten Britain's concerns in the area. It did not, however, deal with either the possible effects on Ethiopia herself or the international implications of an invasion. The Maffey Report only confirmed what everyone already knew: the problem for the Government was one of European politics and domestic opinion and not who would rule Ethiopia.

The Cabinet also considered a report on the probable effects of economic pressure on Italy.<sup>95</sup> The imposition of sanctions would not hurt Britain significantly, because her financial relations with Italy were relatively unimportant. Other League members would undoubtedly follow whatever lead they received from Britain and France, but the co-operation of Germany, Japan, and the United States was problematical. The application of any measures at sea which went beyond the American conception of belligerent rights could lead to the United States's becoming definitely obstructive. The report went on to point out that



Italy's economic position was poor; her geographical characteristics and her lack of essential war material, including coal and oil, rendered her particularly vulnerable to economic sanctions. The gold value of the lira was extremely strained, and serious foreign exchange problems existed. Moreover, Italy's East African position was at the mercy of the closure of the Suez canal, and there was no question but that the canal could be legally closed. Any request to this effect by the Council of the League would override the users' Convention and would even encompass neutral shipping carrying Italian goods. The report warned, however, that closing the canal would entail risking the possibility of war with Italy. Similarly, to effectively embargo imports into Italy, it might be necessary, failing the co-operation of the non-member states, to impose a blockade and invoke belligerent rights. This, too, could very well lead to war. The report clearly warned that to make sanctions effective could involve Britain in a conflict with Italy.

This danger was considered to be very real and was the subject of the most important document the Cabinet examined.<sup>96</sup> Two very recent appreciations of the military situation by the Chiefs of Staff looked in detail at all the possible contingencies in the event of sanctions and war, compared British, French, and Italian strength around the Mediterranean, and recommended certain measures of reinforcement of naval, air, and ground forces. The observations of the Chiefs hardly imbued Ministers with confidence. They warned that any naval engagement, even if Britain were supported by other nations, would result in the further reduction of an already weak fleet 'to such an extent as to be unable to fulfil its world wide responsibilities'. In the air, reinforcement of the Mediterranean with forces drawn from the home defences would

materially affect the air defence of Great Britain and disjoint the arrangements at present in hand for attaining air parity with Germany by April 1937; moreover the existing arrangements for the reinforcement of Singapore could not be counted upon in the case of an emergency of the kind now under consideration.

The Chiefs also warned that at least two months notice would be necessary for British forces to be able to effectively co-operate on a war basis. Therefore, at the forthcoming Geneva meetings at the beginning of September, nothing should be undertaken which would precipitate hostilities, and any contemplated action should be delayed until the military have had time to make adequate preparations:

Any idea that sanctions can be enforced whenever diplomatically desirable is highly dangerous from the point of view of the services, and we urge that no measures almost certain to lead to war, such as the closing of the Suez canal, should be taken until the services are prepared.

The Chiefs asked for a decision as soon as possible on their recommended measures. Finally, they raised the all-important question of the attitude of the French government:

we desire to stress that the moral and political co-operation of France is not sufficient. Her assured military support, concerted with ourselves before the League Council meeting of the 4th September, is essential. Without that, there is great risk of all active measures, together with the onus which they will carry with them, falling on ourselves alone with serious consequences.

The military situation as set out by the Chiefs of Staff, like the economic appreciation from the Committee of Imperial Defence, hardly encouraged the Government to act precipitously to oppose Italy.<sup>97</sup>

The Cabinet also considered the record of a preliminary meeting held the previous day.<sup>98</sup> Present had been Eden, Hoare, Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald, Neville Chamberlain, and Simon. Eden reported on the failure of the Tripartite talks. Despite his warnings that Britain would not tolerate a military and economic occupation of Ethiopia,



Aloisi had completely rejected the Anglo-French proposals and instead put forward outrageous demands; if it came to war, he had said, Italy would wipe Ethiopia off the map. The good news, Hoare reported, was France's apparent sticking with Britain in the face of Italian pressure, and Eden added that Vansittart had received the impression from Léger, his counterpart at the Quai d'Orsay, that France would participate in economic sanctions. As the discussion among the Ministers proceeded, Chamberlain pointed out that even the mildest of such measures could lead to war and therefore steps should be taken to put the armed forces into a state of readiness. The general tone of this preliminary meeting was that France must not be alienated nor Italy provoked, that a war in East Africa was probable, that Britain would most likely have to resort to sanctions, and that the country must be militarily prepared.

On 22 August, with this large amount of information in hand, the Cabinet considered the situation. Hoare reported in detail, and Ministers then discussed the entire problem in all its ramifications, domestic and international, political and economic. In the course of the meeting, many references were made to the unfortunate effect on British diplomacy of the nation's military weakness, and the Cabinet 'were most anxious if possible to avoid a war with Italy which it was generally recognized would be a grave calamity'. Ministers made several important decisions. They authorized considerable reinforcement of the Mediterranean fleet as well as measures strengthening the army and air force.<sup>99</sup> They also agreed that the Committee on Defence Policy and Requirements (DPR) should examine the situation in detail.<sup>100</sup> But the two most important decisions were

- a) That the delegates of the United Kingdom at the forthcoming meetings at Geneva should be authorized to reaffirm the statements that had been made in Parliament as to our intention to fulfil our Treaty obligations.



and

- b) That they should keep in step with the policy of the French Government, and, more particularly in the matter of sanctions, they should avoid any commitment which France was not equally prepared to assume.

These two decisions put Government policy on a fixed course for the next four months. The Cabinet agreed to proceed on the basis of that double line set at the Foreign Office. On the one hand, Britain would support Ethiopia, the League, and collective action; on the other hand, she would keep in step with the French and take no action that might harm Anglo-French relations, alienate Italy, precipitate a Mediterranean war, and destroy the Stresa Front.

Hoare and Eden now had to translate this general attitude into a specific policy to be pursued at the upcoming meetings at Geneva. The Council was to deal with the findings of the arbitration commission, and the Assembly, in its annual gathering, would consider the entire Italo-Ethiopian conflict.

On 2 September, Eden was again on route to Geneva. Accompanied by Vansittart, he stopped in Paris for an hour of conversation with Laval and Léger. The French Premier put one crucial question. He asked for assurances that Britain would be as firm in upholding the Covenant in the future with respect to Europe (an obvious allusion to Germany) as she presently appeared to be with respect to Ethiopia. Eden replied that the future depended upon the success of the League in the present. Laval retorted that such was the response he had expected but that it did not really answer the question. Eden could not give him any stronger assurances: 'the British Government's wariness and the state of our defences made it impossible for me to promise unconditional support

of the Covenant for the future, regardless of the outcome of the present dispute. Like it or not, Abyssinia had become a touchstone'.<sup>101</sup>

Laval was not really so devious and double-dealing as the British consistently made him out to be. He was far from the most straightforward of individuals, and his actions in 1935 tend to be interpreted in the light of his Vichy future; but he genuinely faced problems over Ethiopia. He had to deal with public opinion, much of which, on the Right, was pro-fascist and pro-Italian - and 1935 marked the apogee of the right-wing Leagues like the Croix de Feu and Action Française. Furthermore, by pursuing their double line, the British Government gave him no clear indication of what they would do. Undoubtedly, he greatly valued the Stresa Front, one of the set pieces of the French system of anti-German alliances, but he probably would have followed a clear British lead in support of the League - had he ever received one. Britain, after all, was the most important ally France had. As it was, like the British, he tried to play both ends and - also like the British - he was to end up with neither.<sup>102</sup>

From Paris, Eden journeyed on to Geneva, where the Council convened on 4 September to hear the report of the arbitration commission and to examine separate Italian and Ethiopian notes. The elephantine labours of the commission had produced a mouse: it decided, without having called as a witness the British Colonel who had been at Wal Wal, that the incident had been no one's fault.<sup>103</sup> The Italian note set out the details of alleged Ethiopian atrocities and described that country's failure to live up to her responsibilities as a member of the League. For her part, Ethiopia asked for action to be taken, under Articles 10 and 15 of the Covenant, to safeguard the peace. The Council established the Committee of Five (Britain, France, Poland, Spain, and Turkey) to make another attempt at a solution. It then adjourned.



Hoare arrived in Geneva a few days after Eden and Vansittart. He knew that public opinion, at home and abroad, wanted to see an effective League; he knew that it could prove valuable against Germany. He also knew that the Foreign Office had almost given up the League for dead, that the Cabinet were far from solidly behind it, and that the Stresa Front formed an integral part of British policy. He was worried about a possible war in the Mediterranean and the apparent lack of French assistance, and he was unwilling to push Laval into making a firm commitment. Nevertheless, he decided to try to make a stirring speech which might mobilize the League. As he recalls in his memoirs:

I accordingly determined to make a revivalist appeal to the Assembly. At best, it might start a new chapter of League recovery, at worst, it might deter Mussolini by a display of League fervour. If there was any element of bluff in it, it was a moment when bluff was not only legitimate but inescapable.<sup>104</sup>

On 9 September, the Assembly began its annual session. The rainy season in Ethiopia had almost ended, and there was little doubt that invasion was imminent. For the first time, the entire membership of the League of Nations considered the Italo-Ethiopian problem. Sir Samuel Hoare himself gave the lead. On 11 September, in resounding terms, he pledged full support for collective resistance to aggression. His promise elicited overwhelming approval: 'not for years has any speech at a League assembly by a British delegate made such an impression as this speech did this morning, and this was due not to its oratorical qualities but to its matter'.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, in its leading editorial of 12 September, The Times pronounced that 'his speech will rank high as an authoritative and historic declaration of British policy. Without doubt, he has succeeded in expressing the views, not only of the Government [sic], but of the country as a whole'. Hoare convinced opinion at Geneva, and at home, that Britain intended forcefully to



uphold the principles of the League. Virtually every member now aligned herself in support of the Covenant; even Laval, in his speech on the morning of the 13th, followed suit.<sup>106</sup> The day after the Foreign Secretary's oration, adding weight to his words and reinforcing the impression of Britain's steadfastness, a large portion of the Home fleet, including the battle-cruisers Hood and Renown, arrived at Gibraltar.<sup>107</sup>

Appearances were deceptive, however. Hoare was indeed bluffing. Though in public he and Laval fully supported a League policy, in private they inclined much more to the compromise solution they had been pursuing all along. In conversations they held on the 10th and 11th, Laval stated that international morals were one thing, the interests of a country another. Hoare did not assume so extreme a position. He stated that the double line of policy was essential and that Britain could not support any proposal giving Italy military control over Ethiopia,<sup>108</sup> but he agreed that they must avoid provoking Mussolini into open hostility and that

any economic pressure upon which the League collectively decided should be applied cautiously and in stages, and with full account of the unescapable fact that the United States, Japan and Germany were not Member States of the League. In Laval's words, we had 'to prevent Mussolini being driven into the German camp'.<sup>109</sup>

As the French Premier was later to say publically:

We found ourselves instantly in agreement upon ruling out military sanctions, not adopting any measures of naval blockade, never contemplating the closure of the Suez Canal - in a word we agreed to rule out everything that might lead to war.<sup>110</sup>

Having taken one line in public and the other in private, Hoare returned to London. In Geneva, the League continued with other business, awaiting either invasion or the success of the Committee of Five. After

several meetings, the Five produced a quite detailed report which would have placed Ethiopia under an international mandate administered by the League, thereby preserving her territorial integrity and leaving her sovereignty nominally intact. Whatever the intentions of the drafters, the proposals nowhere mentioned Italy or special Italian interests. However, there were two accompanying protocols issued jointly in the names of the French and British governments. The first repeated the previous offer to Ethiopia of a port in order to facilitate 'territorial adjustments' between her and Italy. The second stated that Britain and France were 'prepared to recognise a special Italian interest in the economic development of Ethiopia. Consequently these Governments will look with favour on the conclusion of economic agreements between Italy and Ethiopia'. The proposals were vague enough to be acceptable to the League, yet at the same time they afforded Mussolini much of what he claimed. Nevertheless, on 22 September, he rejected them, albeit in terms encouraging further attempts at a settlement. The following day Haile Selassie accepted them. On 24 September, the Five admitted failure and referred the matter back to the Council.<sup>111</sup>

The British Government continued with their double line. In public and through Eden in Geneva, they supported the League. In London, however, Hoare still hoped to preserve the Stresa Front. On the evening of 24 September, just after the Five had transferred authority for a solution back to the Council, Eden received from the Foreign Secretary an instruction which read: 'I trust you will not allow any haste on the Council in regard to the discussion of sanctions'.<sup>112</sup> That same day, Drummond handed Mussolini a personal message of friendship from

Sir Samuel Hoare.<sup>113</sup> Three days later, on 27 September, Vansittart added to Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador in London, that Britain did not intend either military sanctions, or the closure of the Suez canal, or any isolated act against Italy.<sup>114</sup>



## Notes to Chapter Five

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1. The only others were Liberia and South Africa, both special cases.
2. James Dugan and Laurence Lafore, Days of Emperor and Clown, p. 14.
3. The population estimate is an approximation given by the Maffey Report. In response to an Italian request in January of 1935 for an exchange of views on the subject of Ethiopia, Sir John Simon appointed at the beginning of March an interdepartmental committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Maffey to examine the situation. Though not feeling qualified to advise on what policy the Government ought to adopt, they 'attempted to determine and to set out what are the main British interests, both those existing now and those which may assume importance in the future, in and around Ethiopia, and to say how those interests would be likely to be affected if Ethiopia passed under Italian control'. Rather than provide an answer to the Italian request, the Report 'aimed merely at providing a basis on which a reply could be framed'. In the course of so doing, it also set out a great deal of useful background information on the nature and history of Ethiopia and her external relations. The Maffey Committee reported on 18 June, and their Report was circulated to the Cabinet on 16 August 1935 as Cabinet Paper 161(35).
4. Dugan and Lafore, pp. 56-57.
5. The Maffey Report referred to this agreement as 'the most important diplomatic instrument affecting Ethiopia'.
6. Dugan and Lafore, pp. 69 and 94.
7. Eustace Percy, Some Memories, p. 166. Ethiopia was an empire of several different peoples. The dominant one, to which Haile Selassie belonged, was the Amhara, who were monophysite Christians; and Amharic was the semitic language in official use. There were also, especially in the south, Moslem and pagan tribes. In the various peace plans proposed during 1935, much was made of the distinction between the Amharic and non-Amharic portions of Ethiopia. Very roughly speaking, the former consisted of the central highland plateau, including Addis Ababa and stretching northward. For more detail on this point and on Ethiopia in general, see Richard Greenfield, Ethiopia.
8. The Maffey Report.
9. The Maffey Report claimed that this was not an attempt to pressure Ethiopia and that the agreement was aimed merely at regulating competition with Italy. Mussolini, though, used it as one of his justifications for invasion.
10. The Maffey Report.
11. Dugan and Lafore, p. 98.
12. Gaetano Salvemini, Prelude to World War II, p. 154.

13. Dugan and Lafore, p. 99.
14. Dugan and Lafore, pp. 100-101.
15. Dugan and Lafore, p. 86.
16. Arnold Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs 1935, volume ii, p. 134.
17. Dugan and Lafore, pp. 86-92. They quote the first hand account of one of the British members of the boundary commission.
18. Dugan and Lafore, p. 101, and Toynbee, p. 137.
19. Toynbee, p. 162.
20. Dugan and Lafore, p. 138. See pages 137-140 for a description of the enormous logistical efforts made by the Italians.
21. An announcement in the Italian Chamber by the Finance Minister on 18 May. The Times, 20 May 1935.
22. The Times, 24 July 1935. Financial Times, 12 July 1935.
23. See the British press from the spring onwards for reports on both the propaganda campaign and the unpopularity.
24. Interview with Mussolini, printed in the Petit Journal (Paris) of 29 September 1935 and reported in the Manchester Guardian on 30 September 1935. The unsettled point about the Laval-Mussolini talks is whether Mussolini actually was given a completely free hand, only believed he was given it, or merely asserted that he was given it. Laval always claimed - in the French Chamber on 22 March and 28 December 1935 and at his trial after the Second World War - that his free hand was only economic. The French Ambassador in Rome, the Comte de Chambrun (who also happened to be Laval's son-in-law), was present at the talks and agreed in his memoirs with Laval. On the other hand, Alexis Léger (head of the Quai d'Orsay) was also there and believed that somehow Laval had given his assent to more. (D.C. Watt, 'Document: The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreement of 1935 on Ethiopia'). Watt quotes a report drafted at the end of 1935 by the Italian Foreign Office:

The fate of Ethiopia and of all the French position on the question of East Africa was virtually already decided at the end of the Mussolini-Laval talks at Rome. With the draft of the letter of January [provided by Watt in an appendix and in fact covering only economic matters and no where mentioning any free hand] and Laval's verbal assurances, the French government was bound to accord Italy a free hand for the satisfaction of her needs of expansion in East Africa and for the settlement once and for all of any questions with the Abyssinian government.



The existence of Laval's 'verbal assurances' is an uncertain matter, as is the entire issue of what exactly he and Mussolini agreed to. Perhaps, as Watt concludes, 'one is left to wonder if the question was not tacitly left in that grey and cloudy limbo where one assumes one has been understood for fear that direct inquiry may show that one has not'.

Anthony Eden records (Facing the Dictators, pp. 221-225) that at his meeting with Mussolini on 24 June 1935 the latter insisted, despite Eden's expostulations, that Laval had meant a completely free hand - that Laval could not write this down but that his meaning was clear. The Italian verbatim record of the talks between Eden and Mussolini confirms that that was what the Italian leader said (Mario Toscano, 'Eden's Mission to Rome on the Eve of the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict').

25. The Maffey Report.

26. Mussolini made his claim in an interview printed in the Morning Post on 17 September 1935. See also the Daily Telegraph of 19 October 1935. Descriptions of this episode at Stresa are given by Ian Colvin (Vansittart in Office, pp. 60-61) and by Sir Robert Vansittart himself (The Mist Procession, p. 528).

One of the Foreign Office officials at Stresa was Geoffrey Thompson. Though Ethiopia was not on the agenda, he discussed the situation very frankly for three hours with two high-ranking officials from the Italian Foreign Ministry. They 'volunteered bluntly that they "could not exclude the possibility of solving the Abyssinian question by force".' Geoffrey Thompson, Front-Line Diplomat, pp. 96-99.

27. Dugan and Lafore, pp. 96-100. The Popolo d'Italia of 31 July 1935 gave Mussolini's ostensible reasons for conquest as 1) 'the vital needs of the Italian people', 2) 'their security in East Africa', and 3) Italy's right to share in Europe's 'civilizing mission'. Quoted from R.W. Seton-Watson, Britain and the Dictators, p. 347.
28. Toynbee, pp. 141-142.
29. Salvemini, pp. 186-187.
30. The Times, 8 July 1935.
31. Toynbee, p. 61. On 5 September, the TUC adopted (2,962,000 votes to 177,000) a resolution calling for the use of 'all the necessary measures provided by the Covenant to resist Italy's unjust and rapacious attack'. The Labour Party's annual conference opened on 30 September and adopted the same motion (Toynbee, p. 63).
32. The Times, 30 August 1935.
33. Viscount Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, p. 160. Churchill made a strong speech in support of the League on 26 September (Toynbee, p. 63).



34. J.L. Garvin, editor of the Observer, continually stressed that it would be folly for Britain and the League to intervene and that to oppose Italy would be an exercise in futility which would destroy the League of Nations. Lord Rothermere's Daily Mail was pro-Italian. Leo Amery, Tory backbencher, former and future Minister, and head of the Imperial Policy Group, was another notable opponent of involvement in the Ethiopian problem. He wanted to avoid all entanglements in this issue, saying, for example, to his constituents in Birmingham on 8 October 1935 that 'I am not prepared to send a single Birmingham lad to his death for the sake of Abyssinia' (Toynbee, p. 64).
35. Thompson, p. 95.
36. Eden, p. 198.
37. Toynbee, p. 145.
38. Cabinet Meeting 27(35). All descriptions of Cabinet meetings and all quotations from them, unless otherwise noted, come from the Cabinet Minutes.
39. Cabinet Paper 98(35), 11 May 1935, 'The Italo-Ethiopian Situation'.
40. Cabinet Meeting 28(35), 17 May 1935.
41. For details of what happened at Geneva see Eden, Salvemini, Toynbee, and F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations.
42. The major biographies of Stanley Baldwin are, in chronological order, Stanley Baldwin by G.M. Young, Baldwin by Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, and Baldwin: The Unexpected Prime Minister by H. Montgomery Hyde. Much shorter but very useful is the sketch in the Dictionary of National Biography by Tom Jones, one of Baldwin's closest friends and confidants.
43. Percy, pp. 89-90.
44. The Earl of Swinton (Philip Cunliffe-Lister), Sixty Years of Power, P. 70.
45. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 171. A letter from Baldwin to Asquith, written in 1926.
46. Winston Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p. 19.
47. Lord Davidson, Memoirs of a Conservative, p. 173.
48. Lord Halifax, Fulness of Days, p. 182; Lord Templewood, Empire of the Air, p. 94, quoted in Middlemas and Barnes, p. 720.

49. Swinton, p. 79.
50. Quoted in Robert Boothby, I Fight to Live, p. 36.
51. Leo Amery, My Political Life, volume iii, The Unforgiving Years 1929-1940, p. 225.
52. See, for example, Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change, pp. 171-172.
53. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 485.
54. Amery, p. 224.
55. A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945, p. 268. Middlemas and Barnes, pp. 248 and 475.
56. According to Macmillan (p. 313), Baldwin was a 'supreme Parliamentarian'; and Swinton (p. 79) said that 'he loved the House and had an instinctive understanding of all its moods; in consequence, he was able to handle it quietly and admirably, and often with brilliance when the going was most critical'.
57. Churchill, p. 33.
58. Quoted in Middlemas and Barnes, p. 579.
59. Davidson, pp. 399-400.
60. Thomas Jones, A Diary with Letters 1931-1950, p. 28. In a diary entry for 27 February 1932, Jones quotes Baldwin on the subject of sanctions on Japan during the Manchurian crisis:

With Russia and America out of the League sanctions are a mistake. I've always thought so. You can't enforce them against a first class power. The very people like Bob Cecil who have made us disarm, and quite right too, are now urging us forward to take action. But where will action lead us to? If we withdraw Ambassadors that's only the first step. What's the next? and the next? If you enforce an economic boycott you'll have war declared by Japan and she will seize Singapore and Hong Kong and we can't, as we are placed, stop her. You'll get nothing out of Washington but words, big words, but only words. That's what I told Van this morning. We can't be going along one road outside the League, with America, and also at the same time profess loyalty to the League and its procedure.

61. R.F.V. Heuston, Lives of the Lord Chancellors 1885-1940, p. 430.
62. Quoted from Toynbee, p. 50.
63. Just before Christmas of 1933, the then Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, had summoned Eden and told him that he had been appointed Lord Privy Seal, because a Foreign Office representative of the rank of Undersecretary was necessary in the Lords, However, MacDonald had continued, previous experience had taught him that



there could not be two Foreign Ministers in the Government, and consequently Eden would not have a seat in the Cabinet (Eden, p. 51). In the spring of 1935, Baldwin took a different attitude. Hoare wanted to go to India as the Viceroy, but Baldwin, influenced by Neville Chamberlain and Geoffrey Dawson, insisted on the Foreign Office. Eden, despite his protests, was also sent there as Minister for League of Nations Affairs, and Baldwin left the two to work out their own division of responsibility and method of co-operation. Baldwin liked and admired Eden, wanted to increase the fresh blood in the Cabinet, and would definitely have given him some Cabinet post in June of 1935. He kept Eden at the Foreign Office because of his popularity in the country and his association in the public mind with the League. To have put Hoare at the F.O. and moved Eden elsewhere would have suggested that the Government were devaluing the League of Nations. With an election approaching, if for no other reason, Baldwin hardly wanted to create this impression (Middlemas and Barnes, p. 822). Baldwin's motivations are understandable, but his action was a mistake. MacDonald, a Prime Minister with a much better understanding of foreign affairs, was correct in thinking that divided responsibility was unacceptable.

64. Templewood, p. 111. See also, The Dictionary of National Biography, and J.A. Cross, Sir Samuel Hoare.
65. Templewood, p. 154.
66. Ibid.
67. Taylor, p. 176.
68. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 117.
69. Macmillan, p. 319.
70. Middlemas and Barnes (p. 871) say of Baldwin 'that he trusted Hoare as he had trusted few of his earlier colleagues and that his only actual worries were about his state of health'.
71. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 822; Swinton, p. 164.
72. Sir Henry Channon, 'Chips': the Diaries of Sir Henry Channon, p. 49. Diary entry for 23 December 1935.
73. Sir Robert Vansittart, The Mist Procession; Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office; and The Dictionary of National Biography.
74. Thompson, p. 86.
75. Templewood, p. 135.
76. Templewood, pp. 138-139 and 148.
77. Eden, pp. 241-242.
78. Eden, pp. 220-221.



79. Cabinet Meeting 34(35):
80. Eden, pp. 220-229.
81. Eden, pp. 230-235.
82. Eden, p. 238.
83. Cabinet Meeting 35(35).
84. Cabinet Meeting 36(35).
85. Cabinet Meeting 40(35).
86. For details of what happened in Geneva, see Eden, Salvemini, Toynbee, and Walters.
87. Eden, pp. 248-253.
88. A record of the meeting is available in the Cabinet Minutes.
89. Baron Pompeo Aloisi was an Italian diplomat and his country's representative on the Council of the League of Nations.
90. Eden, p. 253.
91. Templewood, p. 163.
92. Templewood, pp. 164-165.
93. Records of these conversations may be found in Hoare's private papers kept in the Public Record Office. The reference number is F.O. 800/295. Eden was present during the talks with Samuel, Lloyd George, Lansbury, and Churchill.
94. Cabinet Meeting 42(35).
95. Cabinet Paper 169(35), 21 August 1935, 'Economic Pressure on Italy'. Prepared by the Subcommittee on Economic Pressure of the CID Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War.
96. Cabinet Paper 166(35), 19 August 1935. This contained two reports on the Mediterranean situation by the Chiefs of Staff: C.O.S. 390 of 9 August 1935 and C.O.S. 392 of 17 August 1935.
97. At almost the same time, on 9 August, Mussolini asked Badoglio to consider the possibility of war with Britain. No actual plan of operations existed as, in the past, the idea had always seemed farfetched. The general staffs met to consider the matter, and Badoglio communicated the results of these discussions to Mussolini in a personal letter of 14 August. Italy was stronger on land; but the battle would be on the sea, where British superiority was overwhelming, and in the air, where the two countries were equal in numbers but where Italy's aircraft were obsolete and worn out. Britain, Badoglio concluded, would

undoubtedly win any war. Nevertheless, he added that 'the country, in disgust over British behaviour, would follow the Duce with enthusiasm', and he promised that he would use all available force 'until complete exhaustion' set in. Salvemini, p. 255. He quotes from Corriere d'Informazione (Milan), 14-17 January 1946.

98. Conference of Ministers held on Wednesday 21 August 1935. The record is to be found in the Cabinet Minutes.
99. These reinforcements were not token. They were intended to put the British forces in the Mediterranean on a war footing. In the month following the Cabinet meeting on 22 August, Gibraltar, Malta, Alexandria and the entire Middle East area were all reinforced with men, planes, ships, anti-aircraft defences, and the added logistical necessities. Certain preliminary measures were taken in order that the Suez canal defence plan might be implemented in the event of hostilities. Thirteen RAF squadrons, as well as additional planes and pilots for the existing ones, were sent from Britain. The fleet left Malta for the eastern Mediterranean, there to be reinforced by one aircraft carrier, two destroyer flotillas, and one submarine flotilla, all from the Home fleet, as well as two cruisers from the West Indies and a host of minor vessels. To Gibraltar were sent, from the Home fleet, the battle-cruisers Hood and Renown, three lighter cruisers with six-inch guns, and six destroyers. Both the Mediterranean and Home fleets were brought up to full complement, and the latter was stationed at Portland to wait further instructions. Cabinet Paper 176(35), 20 September 1935: a note prepared by Hankey at Baldwin's request, it was a 'Summary of Precautionary Measures Taken since the Cabinet Meeting of August 22nd, 1935'.
100. This was a subcommittee of the CID. Members were Ramsay MacDonald, Neville Chamberlain, Hoare, Eyres-Monsell, Halifax, Runciman, Cunliffe-Lister, and Eden. Specially added were Baldwin, Simon, and Malcolm MacDonald. The Chiefs of Staff acted as expert advisers to the committee. Hankey was the Secretary.
101. Eden, p. 258.
102. With respect to French policy, Geoffrey Warner (Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France) comments:

Support of Italy over Abyssinia meant rejection of the League; support of Britain meant support of the League. This then was the real choice: the whole system of French security as it had evolved since 1919; or a new, perhaps more effective but as yet untried, system. Laval sought to avoid the choice and ended up with nothing. (p. 96)

If the British government had followed Vansittart's policy, there would have been no difficulty with Laval. Even if it had followed Eden's, Laval would probably have been forced to toe the line in the end. As it was he did not know where he stood and hedged accordingly. Eden's memoirs are replete with expressions of exasperation at Laval's conduct, but the fault was as much the British government's lack of resolution as the French Prime Minister's deviousness. (p. 100)

- 103. Salvemini, p. 280.
- 104. Templewood, p. 166.
- 105. Manchester Guardian, 12 September 1935. The response of Le Temps on 13 September was somewhat different:

- Il est bien regrettable que ce fier langage n'ait pas été tenu par le porte-parole de l'Angleterre en d'autres circonstances. Si le discours d'hier avait été prononcé, soit à Genève soit à Londres, il y a quelque mois, il eût sans doute donné à réfléchir aux dirigeants de Berlin avant de procéder ouvertement au réarmement massif du Reich en violation de la partie V du traité de Versailles, et l'Europe ne connaîtrait peut-être pas la lourde menace que fait peser sur elle l'affirmation de la puissance militaire allemande reconstituée dans les conditions que l'on sait.

- 106. For details of the meeting at Geneva, see Eden, Salvemini, Toynbee, and Walters.
- 107. Eden, p. 262. See above, note 99.
- 108. Eden, p. 260.
- 109. Templewood, pp. 168-169.
- 110. The Times, 30 December 1935. Quoted from a speech made by Laval to the Chamber of Deputies on 28 December 1935.
- 111. The full text of the report of the Five and of the two protocols appeared in The Times, 24 September 1935. See Appendix IV, below.
- 112. Eden, p. 269.
- 113. Colvin, pp. 70-71.
- 114. Salvemini, p. 319. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 858.



Chapter Six

The Second Decision Situation:

From the Invasion to the Hoare-Laval Plan

On 3 October, the long-awaited invasion of Ethiopia finally began. It confronted the British Government with the start of a new decision situation. They now had to deal with war itself rather than the mere threat of war. The potential conflict between their two lines of policy became a real one. Support for the League of Nations entailed actually taking concrete measures against Italy, thereby threatening to alienate the French, endanger the Stresa Front, and possibly even result in a Mediterranean war. However, continuing to search for an Anglo-French compromise acceptable to Mussolini ran the distinct risk of appearing to reward aggression, thereby threatening to further weaken and probably destroy the League. The invasion of Ethiopia aggravated the Government's dilemma. As difficult and unsuccessful as trying to prevent the war had been, stopping it promised to be even costlier.

In London, the Cabinet met four times between the invasion and the dissolution of Parliament on 25 October for the general election.<sup>1</sup> Ministers' concerns remained substantially the same as they had been at the Cabinet of 22 August. They supported Ethiopia, but certainly not wholeheartedly: though favouring a fair settlement, they meant this to include territorial exchanges and economic concessions by Haile Selassie.

They examined a pessimistic report on the probable effectiveness of sanctions and were sceptical about how well they would work;<sup>2</sup> nevertheless, they decided to support them in principle and to go along with those initially recommended by the League. Tentatively, they also agreed that, if the producing states imposed an oil embargo, Britain would join in and consider one on coal. The Cabinet felt, however, that support for any of these measures depended upon full co-operation from all League members, particularly in the event of an attack on Britain's Mediterranean forces, upon the behaviour of the non-members of the League, especially the United States, and upon the attitude of France. Ministers believed that French aid was crucial but doubted that it would be forthcoming; and, given their fears about a possible mad dog act, it is not surprising that at their meetings during October their enthusiasm for sanctions varied directly with the latest appreciation of the likelihood of French support. There was talk of putting pressure on Laval, but Stanley Baldwin 'reminded the Cabinet that we must be careful not to be drawn into a quarrel with the French as well as with Italy as a result of what was happening at Geneva'. Finally, at these meetings, Ministers voiced concern, in the light of the upcoming election, about public opinion and the political situation.

In general, the Government continued to pursue their double line. At the final Cabinet meeting before the dissolution,<sup>3</sup> Hoare informed his colleagues that he had sent Maurice Peterson, the Ethiopian expert at the Foreign Office, to Paris to conduct negotiations. To compensate, and to lay to rest the unease over this expressed in the press and in the House, the Cabinet directed Eden to tell Parliament in the afternoon that 'notwithstanding any conversations that might take place with a view to the settlement of the Abyssinian dispute, nothing would be settled except within the framework of the League of Nations'. Ministers



agreed that this point should be strongly made in public. Thus while privately searching for a compromise, publically the Government, partly out of genuine conviction and partly out of political expediency, maintained their support for Ethiopia and the League. Aggravating this dualism was the split between the beliefs and the preferences of the two Cabinet Ministers at the Foreign Office. Hoare, backed by Vansittart, had already before the invasion reassured Mussolini concerning British intentions,<sup>4</sup> and afterwards in October was trying to move slowly with sanctions while pushing hard for a settlement to be found in Paris.<sup>5</sup> Eden, however, was all for a strong pro-League line and was leading the sanctionist front at Geneva; he was the driving force in all the various committees dealing with Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly the League, under this British leadership, reacted swiftly to the Italian invasion. Both the Council and the Assembly declared Italy an aggressor in violation of the Covenant.<sup>7</sup> Then, for the purpose of organizing sanctions, the Assembly reconstituted itself as a Co-ordinating Committee, which in turn established, for convenience, the smaller Committee of Eighteen that actually did all the work.<sup>8</sup> From 11 to 19 October, the Eighteen held its first session and arrived at five proposals. Eden suggested an embargo on export of arms to Italy and a prohibition on loans and credits to the Italian government and companies. The Eighteen immediately adopted these two sanctions. The third proposal, again recommended by Eden, banned all imports from Italy,<sup>9</sup> and the fourth, put forward by Robert Coulondre the French representative, extended the list of war materiel to be embargoed.<sup>10</sup> The fifth applied not to relations with Italy but to those among the

sanctionist states and provided for mutual support among them. The last three proposals were to be submitted to the various governments for approval, and the Eighteen agreed to reconvene at the beginning of November to set a date for their commencement.

The two Committees met again between 31 October and 6 November. The Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee reported that acceptance of the first four proposals, the sanctions themselves, had been virtually unanimous, that 39 of 50 governments had agreed to the recommendation on mutual support, and that the United States had already prohibited the export of war materiel to either party. The Committee agreed that the third and fourth sanctions should come into effect on 18 November and then adjourned without setting a definite date for its next session.

The Eighteen continued to meet and adopted in principle an embargo on all petroleum products. On 7 November, the Secretary General of the League communicated this proposal to the member governments.

While Eden was leading the League in its pursuit of sanctions, the British Government also continued after the invasion to follow the second of their two lines of policy. Contact among the Tripartite powers had never broken off, and the Anglo-French attempts at a compromise went on.<sup>11</sup> Towards the end of October, Peterson travelled to Paris where he and his counterpart at the Quai d'Orsay, the Comte de Saint Quentin, arrived at possible terms for a settlement.<sup>12</sup> In the final week of the month, outlines of their new proposals appeared in the British papers. These reports varied in specific detail, but they all bore a strong family resemblance to what was eventually to become known as the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>13</sup> Nothing, however, came of these discussions.

The Cabinet never considered any of the proposals, and Peterson himself was recalled to London for the latter part of the campaign and the election - presumably as an electoral precaution.

On 1 November, just after this flurry of press reports, Hoare and Laval met at Geneva for the second session of the Co-ordinating Committee. The French Premier proposed that, with the help of the Belgian delegate, M. van Zeeland, they should transfer the task of conciliation, which had reverted to the Council after the failure in September of the Committee of Five, back to a smaller group. The following day, after the two suggested that Britain and France continue to seek a solution, van Zeeland recommended that the League entrust this job to them. The minutes of the meeting record that the Co-ordinating Committee 'took note of the desire expressed by the Belgian delegate'.<sup>14</sup> No legal mandate was involved, but a 'moral mandate' was spoken of by many diplomats and journalists.<sup>15</sup> That evening, in a classic example of misperception and inaccuracy, Hoare telegraphed to London that 'this proposal was warmly supported by most of the other speakers and opposed by none. It was clear that it represented the unanimous sense of the meeting'.<sup>16</sup> Hoare's appreciation of the situation was not entirely accurate. Rather than bolster the propriety of the Anglo-French talks, this attempt created confusion and mistrust in the minds of some who would otherwise have accepted the explanations given by Hoare and Laval and aroused 'a feeling of uneasiness which marred the unanimity of this last meeting'.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, for what it was worth, the two men had secured the tacit assent of the sanctionist members of the League for their pursuit of a compromise. They had established a basis for any future defence of the legitimacy of the Paris discussions.



When Hoare returned to London, it was to participate in the ongoing election campaign. Parliament had been dissolved on 25 October. In Geneva, the League was pursuing sanctions; in Paris, Peterson, until he was summoned back to London, continued to meet with Saint Quentin; but in Britain, the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was only one of several issues. Though Peterson's telegrams described in detail the Paris proceedings, busy Ministers, caught up in campaigning, had no time to follow the matter closely.<sup>18</sup>

After four years in office, the Government had called the election in order to capitalize on their popularity, due in large measure to their apparent support for the League of Nations, so as to renew their huge majority in the House of Commons and remain in power for another term. They also hoped to gain a mandate to rearm, and Baldwin had initially intended this to be central to the campaign.<sup>19</sup> His intentions remained unfulfilled, as the Government minimized rather than stressed rearmament. The real issue was 'which party can be trusted to promote peace abroad and prosperity at home'.<sup>20</sup> As far as prosperity was concerned, 1935 was a good year in Britain, and whether or not the Government were responsible they were bound to get credit. With respect to peace, they emphasized their support for the League and, instead of accenting the importance of rearmament, promised only the minimum necessary to repair the gaps in the country's defences (in practice, they may have felt that this amounted to the same thing, but the emphasis and consequent effect on public opinion were very different). At the beginning of October, Baldwin had already promised, 'I give you my word there will be no great armaments';<sup>21</sup> and in his final message to the nation, almost on the eve of the election, he pledged

the National Government to work faithfully for security at home and peace throughout the world. spending not a penny more on our own Defence Forces than is necessary for the safety of our people, and striving always to bring the nations into agreement for the all round reduction of armaments in a world where collective security has been made the sure protection against aggression.<sup>22</sup>

The Foreign Secretary did call more strongly for rearmament as British defences 'had got down to bed-rock minimum', but he too dismissed all charges that the Government were attempting to undermine Geneva and stated that a strong League of Nations was the best safeguard for peace.<sup>23</sup> In a speech to his constituents, Hoare denied that there was any wrongdoing in the Paris talks or that there was any endeavour to go behind the back of the League:

Our policy has always been perfectly simple - namely, loyalty to the League and readiness to help with any honourable settlement of the dispute that is acceptable to the three parties concerned - the League, Italy, and Abyssinia.<sup>24</sup>

Overall, the campaign portrayed the Government as staunchly defending the League and the principles behind it and not planning any great increases in military spending. A newspaper not particularly friendly to them could write that, on issues of international relations, 'if the Government means what it says, only a small minority of electors in all parties disagrees'.<sup>25</sup>

Voting took place on 14 November. The Government won a resounding victory, ending up with 432 seats, down from the abnormal results of 1931 but still a majority of almost 250.<sup>26</sup> Their excellent showing was due to economic recovery, to inertia from the previous skewed representation in the Commons, to reluctance to rock the boat and lack of confidence in a Labour alternative, and to the great personal trust in the leadership of Stanley Baldwin. The result also stemmed from the

generally held belief that the Government were determined to support the League and stop Italian aggression. As Harold Macmillan wrote:

But if the Government had won a great electoral victory by a skilful timing of the election - as they were quite entitled to do - they were in honour bound to carry out what, in spite of a sentence here or there of reservation, was believed by the people to be their clear and determined intention - to stop Mussolini. When the House of Commons met in November, no one - inside or outside Parliament - doubted that this was their firm purpose.<sup>27</sup>

By the time that Baldwin's new Government first discussed Ethiopia, on 2 December, matters were rapidly mounting to a climax. The crux of the situation had become the proposed embargo on oil and petroleum products. Unlike most other measures, this one promised to be quick and effective and rapidly to resolve the Italo-Ethiopian conflict.

No industrial country could exist for long without oil, and no modern army could function without it. The Italian economy, with unemployment having risen steadily since 1930,<sup>28</sup> was not in good shape to begin with and had been further weakened by the burden of financing the campaign in East Africa. On 20 October, the Bank of Italy had ceased to publish figures on its gold reserves, and a month later the lira had been devalued by nearly 25 per cent.<sup>29</sup> Sanctions were beginning to have some effect, and economic experts, including Keynes, believed that in the long run they would have grave repercussions.<sup>30</sup> But how long was the long run? As one newspaper put it in the middle of November, while 'the Ethiopian adventure must sooner or later lead to a collapse in Italy's trade and financial resources', she 'would probably be able to resist the sanctions which are imposed today for some time ahead without apparent difficulties'.<sup>31</sup> An oil embargo would



drastically shorten this period. It would also probably ensure the failure of the invasion itself. On the battlefield, after initial successes on both fronts, Italian progress had ground to a halt.<sup>32</sup> The logistical and geographical difficulties and de Bono's extreme caution and lack of self-confidence meant that Mussolini's orders to advance had been ignored and that movement had slowed almost to a standstill. Consequently, on 16 November, the Duce sacked de Bono and replaced him with Marshall Pietro Badoglio, who, unlike his predecessor, was competent. However, wishing to secure his flanks and assure his supplies, Badoglio similarly disregarded orders for an immediate advance. In Britain at this point, most expert opinion anticipated that Italy would have a difficult time in completing her conquest. At least two campaigning seasons were foreseen.<sup>33</sup> Though in a pitched battle superior Italian firepower would inevitably triumph, the Ethiopians could 'indefinitely harass' Mussolini's army if they stuck to guerilla warfare.<sup>34</sup> Expert opinion was wrong, of course; as were the views of almost all of the war correspondents. Italian troops were to enter Addis Ababa in May of 1936 with relative ease. This outcome was obvious to the few correspondents who covered the war from the Italian side, but almost all of them, including Evelyn Waugh, chose or were ordered to Addis Ababa, where they could get no information, from where they filed the most absurd stories on what they believed to be happening, and from where certain of them actually fabricated the reports they sent to their newspapers.<sup>35</sup> The general feeling was that the Italian position was not promising and that an oil sanction would prove effective. The first part of this estimate was wrong; the second might not have been.

Certainly, the Italian government took the threat of an embargo seriously enough to attempt to delay if not prevent it. Through diplomacy and through rumour, they tried to dissuade the League. On 19 November, when reports from Geneva stated that the Eighteen would reconvene very shortly, the Italian press reacted with immediate alarms as to the possible consequences. On the 24th, rumour in Paris had it that Cerutti, the Italian Ambassador, had told Laval that an oil embargo would have untoward effects on Franco-Italian relations.<sup>36</sup> Three days later, the Italian government announced that they had had to cancel leaves and order certain troop movements; and on 30 November, despite an Italian statement on the previous day that there had been no military redeployment towards the French frontier, reports from Austria said that for the past six days Italy had been withdrawing troops from the Brenner. Rumours were carefully disseminated in Rome that an oil sanction would lead to a surprise air attack on the British fleet, and on 30 November the representatives at Geneva of certain members of the Eighteen, other than France and Britain, were informed that implementation of an embargo would be considered an 'unfriendly act' - a very strong term in diplomatic language.<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately for the League, control of oil supplies rested primarily in the hands of the United States, one of the three major powers not members. The other two, Japan and Germany, were of little short-run importance. While it might have been surmised that Japan's sympathies would lie with Italy, another nation flaunting the will of the League, in practice she was marginally on the side of Geneva and the non-white country of Ethiopia.<sup>38</sup> Germany, geographically closer and a possible supplier of industrial and military material, posed a potentially much more serious concern. She held, however, 'with great skill to the course of the strictest neutrality',<sup>39</sup> subjecting to



licence the export of many kinds of goods, including ores and minerals, pitch and distillation products, and coal and iron.<sup>40</sup> Her policy was to neither participate in sanctions nor to increase trade with Italy, and with respect to oil she was of no importance. Germany possessed the long-term interest of wanting all parties to emerge weakened: a triumphant Italy could frustrate the Anschluss, and a successful League might unite Europe against German ambitions in general.<sup>41</sup>

The attitude of the United States, on the other hand, was critical in the short run. The American government interpreted the isolationist sentiment in country and Congress in such a fashion as to keep in step with the League. On 5 October, two days after the invasion, Roosevelt invoked the newly passed Neutrality Act to ban the export of arms and essential war material to the two warring countries. The State Department discouraged trade with both parties, in other words with Italy as commercial relations with Ethiopia were virtually non-existent, and on 1 November the government announced suspension of negotiations for an Italo-American trade agreement.<sup>42</sup> It was, however, with respect to oil that the United States was truly crucial.<sup>43</sup> As the world's largest producer and exporter, she could guarantee the success or failure of an embargo. Not only could American imports make good the losses from League-controlled sources, but also the Italian tanker fleet sufficed to transport the necessary amount (this ignored the possibility of a naval blockade, but that in turn raised the problems of belligerent rights with the United States and maybe war with Italy).<sup>44</sup> On the surface, the government appeared to co-operate with the League.<sup>45</sup> On 15 November, Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State, announced that certain items, such as oil, being indispensable for war their export contravened the policy of the government and the spirit of the Neutrality Act, and a week later he further stated that the abnormal



increase in sales might force the administration to conclude that they were essential war materials.<sup>46</sup> At the end of the month, the Secretary of the Interior called upon the petroleum industry to voluntarily suspend shipments to Italy, and the producers indicated their willingness to do so as soon as Roosevelt asked them.<sup>47</sup> Finally, on 1 December, the day before the new British Cabinet was to discuss the problem, the State Department reaffirmed that trade in key commodities such as oil ought to be restricted to a 'normal basis'.<sup>48</sup>

Despite these statements, U.S. support for sanctions remained uncertain. American exports of oil to Italy were considerably higher in the third quarter of 1935 than during the comparable period the previous year, and they rose sharply in October and November.<sup>49</sup> As for placing an embargo, Roosevelt was waiting for the League. Domestic opinion was such that he could not afford to be seen either too far ahead of the League or slavishly following it, and every delay at Geneva made his position more difficult.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the British Government, as we shall shortly see, did not believe that the United States either could or would effectively halt her oil exports to Italy.

Nevertheless, the League was getting ready to implement the oil embargo. On 19 November, reports from Geneva stated that Senhor Vasconcellos of Portugal, the Chairman of the Eighteen, was preparing to reconvene that body very shortly, and three days later an official announcement set the meeting for the 29th. On the 25th, Laval telephoned Vasconcellos and requested a postponement as he had to remain in Paris for a crucial debate in the Chamber.<sup>51</sup> Vasconcellos agreed to a short delay and said that he would decide upon a new date on the 29th. On that day, Laval telephoned again and asked that the meeting not be before 11 December. After consulting with the British, Vasconcellos arranged

for the next session to begin on 12 December.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the League was soon to make the crucial decision on oil, but Laval had managed to gain time for the Paris talks to produce a compromise.

Under the pressure of this upcoming meeting of the Eighteen, negotiations in the French capital speeded up. Peterson returned on 21 November, convinced that in no circumstances would the Government go to war for Ethiopia, and he and Saint Quentin stepped up their search for a solution.<sup>53</sup> Activity in general picked up. In London and Paris, diplomatic contacts among the French, Italians, and British proliferated, and Pierre Laval finally succeeded in persuading Sam Hoare to stop off in Paris on his way to Switzerland for a vacation.<sup>54</sup>

Amidst this flurry of activity, the CID subcommittee on Defence Policy and Requirements (DPR) met on 26 November.<sup>55</sup> Stanley Baldwin presided and present were several Ministers, Vansittart, and representatives of the three armed services. Hoare opened the discussion with a brief overview of the situation, which, he said, was no clearer and, in some respects, more dangerous than it had been at the last meeting. On the credit side, sanctions had been more effective than some people had thought probable, and the military progress of the Italians was slow, thereby suggesting that they would have difficulties forcing a decision before the rainy season began in the spring. On the other hand, Mussolini seemed to be in an intransigent mood, and, while rumours of an Italian attack in the Mediterranean could be partly discounted as propaganda, nevertheless, due to the proposed oil sanction, Italy's threatening attitude could not be ignored. The Foreign Secretary did not want to suggest that Italian aggression was probable, but he felt that the defensive situation ought to be kept under constant and urgent



observation. Such being the position, he proceeded to raise the two essential issues which the DPR went on to discuss: British defences, especially with respect to anti-aircraft ammunition, and French co-operation.

Both Duff Cooper, the new War Secretary, and Eyres-Monsell, the First Lord, reviewed the details of the availability of anti-aircraft ammunition. Supplies were insufficient for prolonged operations, and, despite the efforts made and the success achieved in raising output, some months must elapse before a reasonably satisfactory position could be reached.

French co-operation was also regarded pessimistically. Chatfield, First Sea Lord and Admiral of the Fleet, presented a very discouraging picture gathered from the recent Admiralty talks with the French naval authorities. The latter were acutely anxious not to become involved in a war with Italy and had not, for example, manned the anti-aircraft defences of Toulon, the main French naval base and the only place in the Mediterranean where the largest of the British ships could dock for repairs. Being unprepared for any helpful operations, if the French did enter the war on Britain's side, they would initially be a burden to an extent, the use of their bases being the only advantage to be gained. Chatfield continued that, while the Admiralty knew what the French naval authorities could do in the event of hostilities, it was not certain that they would be permitted to carry out even such co-operation as they envisaged.

This scepticism was echoed by several Ministers present. Hoare, Simon, Ramsay MacDonald, Eyres-Monsell, and Cunliffe-Lister all shared the same doubt that Baldwin expressed when he said that 'he had always felt that France would not come in with us if real trouble occurred'. The problem, as Chatfield had said, was a matter not so much of



capabilities and promises but of what France would actually do in the crunch. Hoare pointed out that Britain had received clear assurances of co-operation from the French but could not be sure what lay behind that expression of support. The situation had to be clarified. Vansittart suggested that, if Laval could be induced to give a strong lead and make it clear to Italy that war against Britain would automatically involve France, then the British Government would be in a position to tell the French that, in view of this categorical statement, they ought to take certain defensive steps. The real test, Vansittart continued, would be whether the French then took concrete steps. Hoare recommended that Sir George Clerk acquaint Laval with these views and put the matter to him. In their conclusions, the DPR agreed with Hoare and Vansittart:

This procedure would supply the practical test whether the French Government were able, or unable - as has been suspected - to implement their recognized obligations of practical and effective collaboration.

The sense of the meeting, to be echoed by the full Cabinet a few days later, was to proceed cautiously with further sanctions, especially on oil, until the crucial issue of French support, which remained much in doubt, had been cleared up. The Government appeared to be abdicating all responsibility. No one suggested that, were Britain to act decisively, Laval would undoubtedly follow.

On Monday 2 December, with the Committee of Eighteen scheduled to convene ten days hence to decide upon the potentially decisive oil embargo, Baldwin's new Cabinet met. It remained relatively unchanged from his previous one. J.H. Thomas and Malcolm MacDonald had swapped offices, the former becoming Colonial Secretary and the latter Dominions Secretary. Halifax had replaced Londonderry as Lord Privy Seal and

leader of the House of Lords and had himself been succeeded at the War Office by Alfred Duff Cooper. For the first time since 23 October, the full Cabinet discussed the Ethiopian situation.<sup>56</sup> They could no longer afford to temporize; and, in this their most important meeting since 22 August, they made two crucial decisions, one for each of their two lines of policy.

Ministers had before them five new Cabinet Papers. Two of these outlined the nature of the sanctions adopted and proposed at Geneva.<sup>57</sup> A third was the record of the previous Tuesday's DPR meeting. The fourth contained summaries by Vansittart and Hoare of separate interviews each had had during the past few days with General Garibaldi, a semi-official representative from Mussolini.<sup>58</sup> Garibaldi had combined the threat of military action over any oil embargo with a set of peace feelers. Vansittart had called the possibility of war suicidal, but the Italian, though agreeing, had felt that it might nevertheless occur. Both the Permanent Undersecretary and the Foreign Secretary had officially declined to reply to these peace proposals until Peterson's return from Paris but had assured the General that they were absolutely unacceptable as they would in effect give Italy complete control over Ethiopia.

The fifth and most important Cabinet Paper consisted of the latest appreciation of the oil sanction by the Petroleum Department of the Board of Trade and by the Foreign Office.<sup>59</sup> The former believed that Italian stocks did not exceed three months of normal use. The latter noted that a total halt to oil imports would cripple Italy and bring the war to a speedy end, but that a 'complete and immediate embargo is out of the question due to lack of control over American supplies'. The Foreign Office recommended that the Government, while informing the League of their willingness to participate provided the producing states



co-operated, should avoid taking the lead in proposing a sanction on oil but that they should, if the matter were raised and led to some practical action, consent to take part if Romania, the USSR, and the Netherlands also agreed.

This rather hesitant attitude at the Foreign Office was shared by many Ministers. An informal meeting had been held on Friday 29 November in order to discuss the matter. Runciman had totally opposed an oil embargo. Hoare had wished to delay it long enough to allow the Paris talks to check the possibility of a settlement, and Neville Chamberlain had been prepared to agree to this procedure. Only Anthony Eden had been against it.<sup>60</sup>

For the final time before Hoare's trip to Paris, the Cabinet discussed the Italo-Ethiopian conflict in detail.<sup>61</sup> Gloom pervaded the atmosphere. Ministers, fearing a mad dog act, hearing a very unfavourable appreciation of the military situation, and laying great store on French co-operation, were reluctant to push Mussolini too far. The Foreign Secretary noted serious gaps in the system of imperial defence. Eyres-Monsell and Cunliffe-Lister agreed with this general estimate and were especially unhappy about the position in the Mediterranean: in the air, over anti-aircraft defences, and with respect to French aid. Though the fleet would undoubtedly defeat the Italians and control the area, hostilities would result in serious losses which, the two Ministers emphasized, would greatly weaken British strength in the rest of the world. They suggested that, the Mediterranean defences not being ready for war, an attempt should be made at peace, with the threat of an oil sanction left dangling over Italy but no actual date fixed until after a failure of discussions for a compromise. Eyres-Monsell and Cunliffe-Lister also advocated, from the point of view of the services, that no decision to apply further sanctions should be taken until French support had been assured.



Hoare then recommended this same two-stage strategy. He wanted a decision in principle but a postponement of the application. This was what he had favoured in the preliminary meeting the previous Friday, and it foreshadowed the eventual Hoare-Laval Plan. The Cabinet endorsed this procedure. The date would be determined at the second stage if in the meantime no settlement had been reached. As for the specific tactics, Peterson, Hoare reported, had not yet made much progress in Paris, but negotiations were continuing and he proposed to hold talks with Laval on his way to Switzerland for his upcoming vacation. The Cabinet agreed that the Foreign Secretary should see the French Premier and 'press the matter forward as rapidly as possible' (my emphasis). They also decided that, if these conversations seemed to afford a reasonable prospect of success, the Eighteen should be asked, preferably by the French not the British, to postpone fixing a date for the oil sanction until a further meeting.

Stanley Baldwin spoke last and decisively summed up the sense of the Cabinet:

On broad lines there was general agreement, as proved by the discussion. If by any chance hostilities should arise out of these events, the situation for the Government would be a bad one unless everything possible had been done to avoid them, especially when the detailed facts of our defensive preparations became known. If that occurred in dealing with Signor Mussolini, no-one would be willing to tackle Herr Hitler. Consequently if, at the next meeting of the Eighteen, the date could be postponed and time could be gained for peace talks with a view to working arrangements and for enquiries as to whether the oil sanction could be made effective, it would be all to the good. If the claim that had been made that sanctions meant war proved by experience to be true, it would be a disaster of the first magnitude. It had to be remembered that in dealing with Signor Mussolini we were not dealing with a normal kind of intellect. He thought, however, that the Cabinet was right in supporting the Foreign Secretary's proposals, but he hoped that the Cabinet would have an opportunity to re-examine the position in the light of the

latest developments if the peace talks did not hold out a prospect of success. It had to be remembered that it was this country that would have to withstand the first shock of an Italian forcible reaction to sanctions. He himself was not willing to be committed at this moment to the 21st December as the date of the application of oil sanctions.

At this crucial Cabinet meeting on the eve of Hoare's trip to Paris, Ministers made two fateful decisions. First, they admitted that they preferred not to implement the oil sanction. Second, they gave the Foreign Secretary carte blanche to arrive at a settlement with Laval. By agreeing to accept the embargo only in principle and to avoid setting a date for its application, they were restricting its use to that of adding leverage towards persuading Mussolini to accept whatever emerged from the Paris talks. All along, they had favoured this half of the dual line to the Geneva half, and they were now committing themselves fully to the success of a compromise solution. The Government decided to stake everything on the next throw of M. Laval's loaded dice.

In public, however, the Government still stood by both strands of their double policy. On 3 December, they laid out their programme in the Speech from the Throne. They promised rearmament, but only the minimum necessary to safeguard the Empire and fulfil their obligations to Geneva. On the Ethiopian question, they pledged themselves to uphold the League of Nations and collective action and, at the same time, to attempt to find a peaceful solution acceptable to all three parties: Ethiopia, Italy, and the League itself.<sup>62</sup>

After the speech had been moved and seconded, Clement Attlee, Leader of the Opposition, opened the debate. Voicing the same criticisms that were to be levied against the Government by almost all speakers from the Opposition benches, he accused them of following a fatal policy



of dualism. How, he wanted to know, could Italy and Ethiopia be bracketed together as both having to accept any compromise when the former was the aggressor and the latter the victim? He also charged the Government with failing to face up to the real issue: ending the causes of war. He condemned their policy of rearmament and asked 'is not the collective system under the Covenant a guard for our Empire?'.

In reply, Stanley Baldwin avoided specifics and went to work on the underlying feelings of his audience. Freely admitting the charge of following a double line, he appealed to his fellow members love of peace and said that 'if any statesman brought this country into war by neglecting anything which he could do with honour and in conjunction with other members of the League, his name would very properly be held in execration'.

The debate continued. Two days later, it was devoted entirely to foreign affairs. Hugh Dalton attacked the Government for not having moved far or fast enough. They should implement the oil sanction which would be decisive. He hoped that in Paris Sir Samuel would indicate how troubled British public opinion had been by the tergiversations in French policy during recent months and would inform M. Laval that Britain was not interested in 'any terms of settlement which will allow the Italian dictator to profit by reason of his aggression'.

Hoare began his answer by stressing the importance of collective action. All League members must share in the responsibilities and the risks. He then justified the Government's double line on the grounds that both the League and the House of Commons had time after time approved it. Sanctions were working well and the Eighteen would shortly meet to discuss the practicality of the oil embargo, to which both Britain and the League had in principle agreed, and this country would



take its share in whatever collective action was decided. The delay in this meeting, due to the domestic political crisis in France,

gives a further opportunity for an intensive effort to bring about a peaceful settlement.... the French and we intend not only to go on trying but to redouble our efforts during the short period of time that is still open before the Geneva meeting.

Nevertheless, the Foreign Secretary added, there was no likelihood that the League would weaken in its pursuit of collective action. He concluded with a reminder that peace everywhere was the basis of the Government's foreign policy.

Hoare was followed by a former Foreign Secretary, Sir Austen Chamberlain, who was later to play a decisive role during the climax of the Hoare-Laval crisis. When he came to deal with the Ethiopian problem, Sir Austen took his stand upon a matter of principle. He emphasized his warm friendship with Italy and expressed his distaste and dislike for Ethiopia, a slave-holding and a slave-raiding state and a bad neighbour whom the British Government had not thought worthy of League membership. He approved the double line of policy, and he wished the Government to make clear to the Ethiopians that indefinite pressure would not be put on Italy and that they would only be supported until a solution acceptable to the Italians and endorsed by the League could be found. Ethiopia, Sir Austen said, was not the client he would have chosen to fight a test case. Nevertheless, a great principle was at stake: 'whether all the efforts which have been made since the War to establish a new public law and new standards of conduct between nations are to be abandoned at the first test, or are to be asserted, and by the assertion of them, strengthened'.

Backbenchers from both sides of the House continued the debate. The Italo-Ethiopian conflict and armaments were the two main points at issue, and the Government's policies were criticized and defended,

both in general and with respect to details. Anthony Eden then concluded both his own speech and the day's debate with a pledge of support for collective security.

The debate in the House of Commons began on the first anniversary of the Wal Wal incident. This minor skirmish at an obscure watering hole deep in the arid wastes of Ethiopia's Ogaden desert had turned into a major international problem, presenting the British Government with an acute dilemma. Support for the League of Nations became increasingly incompatible with the preservation of the Stresa Front, and the whole thrust of the Government's policy was to balance between the two and somehow preserve both. By the beginning of December of 1935, the imminent possibility of an oil embargo on Italy brought matters to a head. The imposition of this measure threatened to lead to a Mediterranean war between Britain and Italy, to imperil Anglo-French relations, and to irretrievably destroy Stresa. Yet, given the Government's public pledges of support for the League of Nations, any postponement of the embargo without good reason would ruin their credibility and shatter the League. To find such a good reason, Sir Samuel Hoare was about to leave for Paris, there to try to find that compromise solution which would save Stresa without destroying the League of Nations.



## Notes to Chapter Six

1. Cabinet Meetings 45(35), 46(35), 47(35), and 48(35) of 9, 15, 16, and 23 October 1935. The second of these meetings was a special Cabinet devoted to the coal-mining industry; but, at the other three, the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was discussed in some detail.

All descriptions of and quotations from Cabinet meetings, unless otherwise noted, are taken directly from the Cabinet Minutes.

2. Cabinet Paper 186(35), 4 October 1935. A provisional report on economic and financial sanctions against Italy from the CID Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War.
3. Cabinet Meeting 48(35), 23 October 1935.
4. See above, pp. 149-150.
5. Anthony Eden, Facing the Dictators, pp. 281-282, and Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin, p. 861. Arnold Toynbee (Survey of International Affairs 1935, volume ii, p. 284) notes that in October Hoare telegraphed to Sir Sidney Barton in Addis Ababa instructing him to push Haile Selassie to consent to begin negotiations for a compromise.
6. Toynbee, pp. 235-236, and F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations, p. 654.
7. The Council agreed that all members of the League were now obligated to fulfil their duties under Article 16 of the Covenant (Walters, p. 654). Article 16 stated:

1. Should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Articles 12, 13 or 15, it shall ipso facto be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which thereby undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial or personal intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State, whether a Member of the League or not.

2. It shall be the duty of the Council in such case to recommend to the several Governments concerned what effective military, naval or air force the Members of the League shall severally contribute to the armed forces to be used to protect the covenants of the League.



3. The Members of the League agree, further, that they will mutually support one another in the financial and economic measures which are taken under this Article, in order to minimize the loss and inconvenience resulting from the above measures, and that they will mutually support one another in resisting any special measures aimed at one of their number by the covenant-breaking State, and that they will take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the Members of the League which are co-operating to protect the covenants of the League.

4. Any Member of the League which has violated any covenant of the League may be declared to be no longer a Member of the League by a vote of the Council concurred in by the Representatives of all the other Members of the League represented thereon.

8. The Co-ordinating Committee was a standing conference of the fifty out of fifty-four League members who supported sanctions (the other four were Italy and her client states of Albania, Austria, and Hungary). It had no legal power. It simply recommended action to the member states who were obligated under the Covenant, but not under any decision of either the Co-ordinating Committee or the Committee of Eighteen, to implement sanctions. For these legal points, see Sir John Fischer Williams, 'Sanctions Under the Covenant', in The British Yearbook of International Law 1936.

The member states of the Eighteen were Argentina, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, Greece, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the USSR, and Yugoslavia.

Senhor Vasconcellos of Portugal was the chairman of both of these committees. (For these details, see Toynbee, p. 222, and Walters, pp. 655-659.)

9. Thereby putting an end to the 70 per cent of the Italian export trade that went to League members and harming Italy's financial position. Walters, p. 660.
10. Coulondre held the position of Assistant Director of the Political and Commercial Affairs Department at the Quai d'Orsay. One of his recommendations was 'means of propulsion such as oils and petrols' (Manchester Guardian, 14 October 1935). In the light of future events, the fact that the suggestion for the oil sanction originally came from the French seems rather ironic.

11. The day after the invasion, Italy submitted 'most cordial' notes to France and Britain saying that the military operations did not preclude friendly discussions among the Tripartite powers with a view towards reaching a peaceful settlement - although one which would give 'satisfaction to the just demands of Italy' (The Times, 5 October 1935). On 16 October, Mussolini sent his minimum terms for a peaceful solution to the French government (Gaetano Salvemini, Prelude to World War II, p. 348), and it was in response to these Italian proposals that Peterson went to Paris (Geoffrey Warner, Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France, pp. 109-110). And on 18 October, after Drummond had met with Mussolini in the morning, a semi-official statement was released in Rome that evening:

Conversations are proceeding through the normal diplomatic channels between Paris and Rome and Paris and London. For the moment there is nothing specific, but the fact that these conversations are continuing shows that the doors are not closed (The Times, 19 October 1935).

12. Lord Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, p. 174.
13. Manchester Guardian, 25 October 1935; The Times, 26 October 1935; the most detailed version appeared in the Daily Herald of 30 October 1935.
14. Toynbee, p. 285. See also Walters, p. 664, and Salvemini, p. 366.
15. The Times, 4 November 1935, for example, used this expression. Laval denied that such a meaning was appropriate - however, his denial was after the fact, in the Chamber on 28 December 1935. There was certainly no legal mandate involved. In Toynbee's felicitous phrase (p. 285), only the Council could transfer the authority 'from a Committee of Five to a Conspiracy of Two'.
16. Quoted from the British White Paper on Ethiopia, Cmd. 5044, 14 December 1935.
17. The Times, 4 November 1935.
18. Templewood, p. 176.
19. Manchester Guardian, 10 October 1935. Middlemas and Barnes (p. 864) write that beyond all doubt Baldwin 'intended the mandate to rearm to be the central issue of the campaign'. In fact, it was not.
20. The Times, 12 November 1935.
21. Winston Churchill, The Gathering Storm, p. 180.
22. The Times, 13 November 1935.
23. The Times, 8 November 1935.
24. Toynbee, pp. 283-284.
25. Manchester Guardian, 24 October 1935.



26. East Fulham returned to the Tories. The Times, 16 November 1935.
27. Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change, p. 435.
28. Toynbee, p. 25.
29. Walters, p. 665.
30. Manchester Guardian, 21 October 1935.
31. Financial News, 18 November 1935.
32. James Dugan and Laurence Lafore, Days of Emperor and Clown, pp. 200-212.
33. A.J.P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War, pp. 92-93.
34. The Times, 11 July 1935.
35. Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty, chapter 8, 'The Real Scoop 1935-1936'. For a thinly disguised fictional account of war reporting in Ethiopia, see Evelyn Waugh's Scoop.
36. Manchester Guardian, 26 November 1935.
37. Toynbee, pp. 278-279. Daily Telegraph, 30 November 1935.
38. Cabinet Paper 169(35), 21 August 1935. 'Economic Pressure on Italy', prepared by the Subcommittee on Economic Pressure of the CID Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War.
39. Manchester Guardian, 2 December 1935.
40. Cabinet Paper 212(35), 27 November 1935. 'Embargo on Oil Supplies to Italy', consisting of two memoranda, one from the Foreign Office and the other from the Petroleum Department of the Board of Trade.
41. Toynbee, pp. 90-92.
42. Toynbee, pp. 92-96 and 242-243.
43. In 1935, the United States produced 134 million metric tons of petroleum. The next largest source was the Soviet Union at 24 million tons. Total world production was 224 million tons. British White Paper, Cmd: 5094, February 1936. 'Report of the Committee of Experts regarding Petroleum and its Derivatives, By-products, and Residues. Geneva, February 12, 1936.'
44. Cabinet Paper 212(35).
45. No specific legislation existed for preventing oil exports to Italy. However, the Shipping Board held a large number of mortgages on tankers, and on 13 November it actually foreclosed on one planning to transport oil to Italy. Of course, the Board could not foreclose on Italian tankers. Dugan and Lafore, p. 213.
46. Cabinet Paper 212(35). Toynbee, p. 244.



47. Manchester Guardian, 30 November 1935.
48. The Times, 2 December 1935.
49. Cabinet Paper 212(35). Toynbee, p. 243.
50. The Times, 26 November 1935.
51. According to Laval's biographer (Warner, p. 112), his request for a postponement really was due to severe domestic problems. At the time, the British newspapers accepted this interpretation: The Times, 26 November 1935, and the Manchester Guardian, 27 November 1935. Of course, this delay did not hurt his chances of finding a compromise in the extra days now available. Many believed that this was his real reason.
52. Toynbee, p. 279.
53. Maurice Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain, p. 118.
54. Templewood, p. 175. Warner, p. 115.
55. Cabinet Paper 220(35), 28 November 1935. 'The Italo-Abyssinian Dispute.' Extracts from the minutes of the 14th meeting of the CID Subcommittee on Defence Policy and Requirements (DPR) held on 26 November 1935. Circulated by Hankey at Baldwin's request. Present at the meeting were all Ministers who were members: Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald, Neville Chamberlain, Simon, Hoare, Malcolm MacDonald, Duff Cooper (who was designated to replace Halifax at the War Office), Eyres-Monsell, Cunliffe-Lister, Runciman, and Eden. Also present were Vansittart; Sir Warren Fisher, Secretary to the Treasury; Admiral of the Fleet Sir Ernle Chatfield, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff; Air Chief Marshall Sir Edward Ellington, Chief of the Air Staff; and Major-General J.G. Dill, Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, representing the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Hankey, of course, was the Secretary to the Committee.
56. Cabinet Meeting 50(35), 2 December 1935. Actually, the new Cabinet first met on 27 November; but, as they were slated to hold this special meeting on Ethiopia on 2 December, there was no discussion of that subject at that time.
57. Cabinet Paper 200(35), 22 October 1935, 'Resolutions Adopted by the Co-ordinating Committee at Geneva'. And Cabinet Paper 208(35), 22 November 1935, 'Resolutions Adopted by the Committee of Eighteen at Geneva on the 2nd and 6th November 1935'.
58. Cabinet Paper 225(35), 29 November 1935. Record of conversations with Vansittart (25 November) and Hoare (28 November).
59. Cabinet Paper 212(35).
60. Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain, p. 188. Diary entry for 29 November 1935. Chamberlain says that Simon also attended this meeting but gives no indication of what, if anything, he said.

61. All Ministers were present except Hailsham. Prior to Hoare's departure, the Cabinet actually met once more - on Wednesday 4 December. Their discussion of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was confined to the fifth proposal of the Eighteen: mutual support among the sanctionist countries. The major topic was German rearmament. Hoare circulated Phipps's extremely grave despatches from Berlin and added his own warning that he was very dissatisfied with the condition of Britain's defences: 'Germany, even if not completely ready, might easily take some action if satisfied that the defences of other countries were even further behindhand'. These circumstances could hardly have made Hoare less anxious to find a compromise in Paris. (See above, Chapter Three, page 81 and note 17.)
62. This summary of the Throne Speech and of the following debate is taken from Hansard: Parliamentary Debates. Official Report. Fifth Series. Volume 307. 26 November - 20 December 1935.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Hoare-Laval Plan**



One conviction I carried back with me to  
Paris - that in no circumstances would the  
Baldwin government go to war for Abyssinia.

- Maurice Peterson<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of November, as the possibility of an oil embargo drew near, the pace of diplomacy among the Tripartite powers picked up. On the 21st of the month, with the election over and the Government securely ensconced in office for another term, Peterson returned to Paris and resumed with Saint Quentin the search for a negotiated settlement. During the following days, Laval met several times with Clerk and Cerutti (the Italian Ambassador in Paris) and continued to thread his way between the British and the Italians. He spoke to the former about Anglo-French co-operation and about postponing the upcoming session of the Eighteen, and he proceeded to arrange for it to be delayed until 12 December. He then passed on to the latter the latest peace proposals but accompanied them with warnings not only that they were the last offer that could be made before the forthcoming meeting at Geneva but also that any attack on Britain would bring in France.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of this delicate diplomatic manoeuvring, Laval was also attempting to arrange a meeting with the British Foreign Secretary. Although Hoare rejected the French Premier's initial request to come to London, he agreed to stop off in Paris on his way to Switzerland

for a badly needed vacation. On 2 December, when all had been arranged, Hoare informed his Cabinet colleagues of his plans and received their permission to see Laval and to 'press the matter forward as rapidly as possible'.<sup>3</sup> In London, the Foreign Office continued to pursue its dual line. Vansittart met with Grandi, the Italian Ambassador, on 3, 4, and 5 December to discuss the terms of a possible compromise,<sup>4</sup> and the latter was later to say that 'the Laval-Hoare plan of 1935 was nothing more or less than the Grandi-Vansittart plan'.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the Permanent Undersecretary saw Corbin, the French Ambassador, on 6 December and warned him that any settlement must be acceptable to the League of Nations and thereby strengthen not destroy it. He also expressed his disappointment with the French attitude and with the lack of firm co-operation on the part of M. Laval's government.

Both The Times and the Manchester Guardian kept their readers well aware of the general nature if not the specific details of these developments. They speculated that chances were quite good that Mussolini would accept the proposals likely to emerge from the Paris talks, and on 6 December they printed broadly accurate versions of the Peterson-Saint Quentin recommendations. They noted, however, that while substantial progress towards a settlement had been made differences still remained between the British and French positions.

To bridge these differences, Vansittart went to Paris on the afternoon of Friday 6 December, and Hoare joined him the following day. Both were determined to find a compromise solution to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. They hoped to save the League of Nations as well as the Stresa Front, but their primary concern was to arrive at, over the weekend, some scheme which would enable them to postpone the oil embargo, thereby ensuring no war in the Mediterranean and averting potential crises in both Anglo-French and Anglo-Italian relations.



Despite their evasiveness at the time and in their memoirs, there can be no doubt that such was their real intention. Eden certainly feared that something was afoot and shortly before the Foreign Secretary's departure warned him against Laval - and added, 'don't forget that in Paris, Van can be more French than the French'. Hoare reassured Eden: 'Don't worry, I shall not commit you to anything. It wouldn't be fair on my way through to my holiday'.<sup>7</sup> Whatever this exchange might have meant, it did not signify the Foreign Secretary's true feelings. The Cabinet had already authorized him to push for a compromise;<sup>8</sup> Baldwin had told him just before he left that, while he might push Laval as far as he could, he was on no account to involve Britain in war;<sup>9</sup> in Parliament, he had announced that he was going to redouble his efforts to find a peaceful solution;<sup>10</sup> and in a telegram sent to Drummond the day before he departed, Hoare said that he was meeting Laval 'with the desire of finding' a negotiated settlement.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, just prior to leaving London, Vansittart asked two of his officials how long it would take to alter the climate of opinion on Ethiopia. Rex Leeper, head of the news department, replied that three weeks would be necessary to prepare the public mind for a compromise instead of sanctions. 'We have only three days,' declared Vansittart.<sup>12</sup>

Hoare arrived in Paris late in the afternoon of Saturday 7 December. Vansittart, Clerk, and Peterson met him at the station; and, after a brief stop at the Embassy, all four went to the Quai d'Orsay.<sup>13</sup> There, after pushing their way in past a horde of reporters and photographers, they began discussions at half past five with Laval, Léger, Saint Quentin, and René Massigli, a senior diplomat and head of the permanent French delegation to the League of Nations.



The initial concern of Laval was to postpone implementation of the oil embargo; that of Hoare was to ensure French support in the event of hostilities in the Mediterranean.<sup>14</sup> The French Premier opened the conversations with the assertion that he had learned, both from his own ambassador in Rome and the Italian ambassador in Paris, that Italy considered the oil embargo a military measure. As no country could exist without petroleum and no war could be carried on without it, he was absolutely sure that Mussolini would reply with 'some resolution taken in a spirit of despair' - with a Mediterranean attack. Laval continued that, while the embargo need not be permanently abandoned, he wished to postpone it and first attempt conciliation. On the question of a common military front, he added that he had, following his interview with Sir George Clerk, warned the Italians that they must not make a mistake in judging the French attitude. The British Foreign Secretary was not convinced on either point. His information led him to believe that an oil embargo would be regarded as an economic measure and not a hostile act. Nevertheless, an Italian attack was possible, and he wished to know the position of M. Laval's government. While not meaning to criticize France, he must know the true situation. Laval replied that the policy of sanctions did not command universal approval in France but that when all was said and done France did not break her engagements. However, he had received fresh confirmation that an embargo meant war and, precisely because of France's determination to honour her commitments to Britain, he wished to persuade the British to do everything possible to avoid what would be a very risky adventure. Hoare agreed that the sanction on petroleum increased the danger of a mad dog act and that the search for peace must be pressed on, but he stipulated that if the embargo were to be postponed there must be good hope of the negotiations' proving successful. It was therefore necessary to convince

Italy that Britain and France stood together. Naval talks ought to be carried further and supplemented by army and air conversations. To this, Vansittart added that the fixing of the date for the embargo, the peace discussions, and these staff talks ought all to proceed simultaneously. Laval accepted this suggestion; and, on this note of apparent agreement, the opening phase of the discussions ended.<sup>15</sup>

Hoare and Laval next turned to the actual substance and procedure involved in any settlement. The Foreign Secretary warned that it was essential to avoid creating any impression that the League of Nations was weakening. The French Premier agreed but stressed that Geneva would undoubtedly accept whatever Britain and France approved. His own position, he said, fell somewhere between those of Britain and Italy. Though the demands of the latter were indeed excessive, he appealed to the Foreign Secretary to be more generous. Hoare replied that it was crucial not to give the appearance of rewarding the aggressor: the proposals must be based on those of the Committee of Five; Ethiopia must gain an outlet to the sea; and any idea of an Italian mandate must be excluded. The arrangement must be a 'judicious mixture of an exchange of territory and the conferring of economic concessions'. Vansittart added that the proposals must be joint Anglo-French ones: there could be no question of France's acting as a mediator between Britain and Italy. Moreover, he noted, there was a limit to what the Emperor could be expected to cede, even in return for a port. To go beyond this limit would greatly endanger the League itself. Laval accepted the application of the principles set down by the Five, but he stated that their idea of an international mandate over Ethiopia did not interest Mussolini.

At this point, as it was getting late, the meeting adjourned. Hoare had originally intended to carry on to Geneva on Saturday night, but it was agreed that, contrary to plan, he would remain overnight in



Paris in order that discussions might continue on Sunday. At the end of the day's talks, a communiqué was released:

The two Ministers confirmed the existence of complete agreement between the two Governments for the continuation of a policy of close collaboration. They began an exchange of views which will be continued tomorrow in order to determine the bases which might be proposed for the friendly settlement of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute.<sup>16</sup>

Conversations resumed Sunday morning at half past ten. Rather oddly, neither Peterson nor Saint Quentin, the two experts on the situation, attended.<sup>17</sup> Despite their absence, both the substance of a set of proposals and the procedure for handling them were considered and agreed upon.<sup>18</sup>

The actual terms of settlement consisted of Ethiopian concessions to Italy disguised as an equitable exchange of territory (see Appendix II for a map and details). In the north, Ethiopia would cede a portion of eastern Tigré adjoining Eritrea, in the northeast a portion of the Danakil also adjoining Eritrea, and in the south a portion of the Ogaden adjoining Italian Somaliland. To the south and west, Italy would also receive a zone for economic expansion extending south from latitude 8° and east from longitude 35°. While that part of the Ogaden ceded directly was useless desert in which no Italian could survive, let alone prosper, this economic zone included fertile land with a reasonably temperate climate. In return for all of these concessions, Ethiopia would receive an outlet to the sea, preferably at Assab in Eritrea but alternatively at Zeila in British Somaliland if the Emperor wished, and a corridor of access to it. However, Laval took good care to safeguard French economic interests. He and Hoare agreed that Britain and France would attempt to obtain from the Ethiopian government



an undertaking not to construct from the Ethiopian [sic] port which it acquires a railway communicating with the interior and also an undertaking to conclude with the French government all the necessary arrangements to safeguard the interests of the port of Djibuti and of the Franco-Ethiopian railway.<sup>19</sup>

In broad outline, these terms of settlement were compatible with the Anglo-French protocols which accompanied the report, in September, of the Committee of Five. They were, however, only barely in keeping with the actual recommendations of the Five and their suggestion of 'international assistance to Ethiopia'. The Hoare-Laval Plan was far more generous to Italy than to Ethiopia and provided a solution mainly at the latter's expense. Nevertheless, it would have provided Haile Selassie with the valuable benefit of direct access to the sea, and it would have left him with a great deal more than he was shortly to end up with.

Having thus dealt with substantive matters, Hoare and Laval turned to procedural ones. Wanting very much for Mussolini to accept their Plan, they decided partly to bribe and partly to blackmail him into doing so. As soon as the British Government had given their approval to the proposals, an outline of them was to be communicated strictly confidentially to the Italian leader, who would be asked for a reply in principle within twenty-four hours. He was also to be informed that, were he to accept these terms as a basis for negotiation, the Committee of Five would meet on Thursday 12 December before or instead of the Eighteen and ensure that no oil embargo be implemented. The French Premier gave his assurances that he would put all possible pressure on Mussolini to accept the proposals and that he would make it clear to him that if he refused then the sanction must proceed. Hoare and Laval agreed that no bargain would be made and that it would

be stated quite plainly that, if negotiations had not started satisfactorily, it would be impossible for the embargo to be delayed. Assuming that Mussolini could be so informed on Monday 9 December, the following day the Emperor would be told that Britain and France were seeking a solution based on the proposals of the Five which Ethiopia had accepted last September and that his representative would be heard when the Committee met. If a favourable reply came from Mussolini, the Five would indeed be summoned for Thursday. They would either proceed with further negotiations themselves or delegate the matter back to the French and the British. Thus, Mussolini was to be bribed with the promise of Ethiopian territory and economic concessions, and he was to be blackmailed with the threat of the oil embargo. This combination, Hoare and Laval calculated, would succeed in getting the Italians to agree to sit down to negotiations and consequently would furnish a legitimate excuse for postponing the oil embargo.

At half past six on Sunday afternoon, the talks finally finished. With the proposals and the procedure settled, the French Premier and the British Foreign Secretary sealed their agreement by initialling the Hoare-Laval Plan. That same evening, a joint communiqué was released:

Animated by the same spirit of conciliation, and inspired by close Franco-British friendship, we have in the course of our long conversations of to-day and yesterday sought the formulas which might serve as a basis for a friendly settlement of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute.

There could be no question at present of publishing these formulas. The British Government has not yet been informed of them; and, once its agreement has been received, it will be necessary to submit them to the consideration of the interested Governments and to the decision of the League of Nations.



We have worked together with the same anxiety to reach as rapidly as possible a pacific and honourable solution. We are both satisfied with the results which we have reached.<sup>20</sup>

The British Foreign Secretary was indeed well satisfied with what he had accomplished. As he drove away from the Quai d'Orsay, 'Vansittart and Clerk congratulated me on having re-established the Anglo-French front'.<sup>21</sup> During the few hours remaining before his departure for Switzerland at ten o'clock, he hastily wrote a letter to the Cabinet explaining what had been decided and strongly advocating that they act at once on the basis he and Laval had set out (see Appendix II). He concluded that

The recommendations, in my view, have two great advantages. In the first place, they reduce the question of territorial cessions to a minimum. In the second place, they bring back the League into the front of the picture and put the responsibility for the settlement where it should lie - upon the shoulders of the League rather than upon the French and ourselves.

Hoare felt that he had very good reasons for his actions. By arranging an excuse for postponing the oil embargo, he believed that he was, as Baldwin had instructed him to do before he left London, keeping Britain out of a war.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, he was convinced that the proposals were the best that could be arranged under the circumstances and were

the minimum upon which the French government were prepared to proceed, and this minimum was only reached after two days of strenuous discussions.<sup>23</sup>

The British negotiators also felt that any terms less favourable to the Italians would not induce them to stop fighting and agree to a negotiated settlement.<sup>24</sup> Most important, though, were their perceptions of the

military situation in the Mediterranean and the threat of war. Despite Laval's firm assurances of support,

France as a whole was determined not to go to war with Italy.... To force France against her will to fight would have meant a definite break of the Anglo-French understanding, and therewith risked the end, not only of the League of Nations, but, far more serious, of European civilization. Europe would have been left at the mercy of Germany when the time came for Berlin to move.<sup>25</sup>

Even though the French government had finally been persuaded to show a much more willing attitude to co-operate, the British felt there was little in practice they could or would do.<sup>26</sup> Very simply, Hoare and Vansittart were afraid, not of losing, but of the consequences of Britain's having alone to bear the brunt of an Italian attack. This would, they felt, not only end Stresa, undermine the Anglo-French entente, and weaken Britain's own defences, but it would also destroy the League of Nations. Rather than risk this calamity, the Foreign Secretary attempted to reach a settlement which would be acceptable to Mussolini, shore up relations between Britain and France, yet still satisfy and preserve the League.<sup>27</sup> He believed that he had found one in the Hoare-Laval Plan.

The Foreign Secretary and the Permanent Undersecretary were very pleased with what they thought they had achieved. That evening, Hoare left for Switzerland and his badly needed holiday. By the time he arrived at the station, he was absolutely exhausted. He seemed so near collapse that his secretary thought he would have to support him.<sup>28</sup> Peterson travelled overnight to London with a copy of the proposals and with the Foreign Secretary's letter to the Cabinet. Vansittart remained in Paris for further negotiations. None of the three anticipated the storm that was about to break.



## Notes to Chapter Seven

1. Maurice Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain, p. 118.
2. See the Manchester Guardian and The Times for these developments.
3. Lord Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, p. 175. Geoffrey Warner, Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France, p. 115. For the Cabinet's authorisation, see above p. 178. On 3 December, the Manchester Guardian reported that Hoare was going to Paris to talk to Laval.
4. Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change, p. 440.
5. Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office, p. 74.
6. Cabinet Paper 234(35), 6 December 1935. 'Record by Sir Robert Vansittart of a conversation with the French ambassador.'
7. Anthony Eden, Facing the Dictators, p. 298.
8. See above, pp. 178-179.
9. Templewood, p. 178.
10. On 5 December 1935; see above, p. 181.
11. Telegram from Hoare to Sir Eric Drummond in Rome, 6 December 1935. Foreign Office registry number J 8935/1/1, to be found in the Public Record Office in file number F.O. 401/35.
12. Colvin, pp. 74-75.
13. In his memoirs (p. 179), Hoare recalls going directly from the station to the Quai d'Orsay. His biographer (J.A. Cross, Sir Samuel Hoare, p. 243) says that according to Hoare's private secretary they all stopped first at the British Embassy where Peterson briefed the Foreign Secretary.
14. The details of Saturday's meeting may be found in Cabinet Paper 233(35), 9 December 1935, 'Record of a meeting held at the Quai d'Orsay on 7 December, 1935, at 5:30 p.m.' This document is reproduced in Appendix II.
15. In fact, British military representatives arrived in Paris the next day, Sunday 8 December. Staff talks began on Monday and lasted for several days. For an account of these talks, see C.O.S. 423, 11 January 1936, 'Military and air conversations between British and French representatives in Paris'. This document is available in the Public Record Office in file CAB 53/26.
16. Eden, p. 299.
17. Colvin, p. 78.

18. For Sunday's meeting, unlike Saturday's, there was no formal record. The most detailed account available, and the one least coloured by hindsight, is in Hoare's letter to the Cabinet written Sunday evening. That and the proposals themselves may be found in Cabinet Paper 235(35), 9 December 1935, reproduced in Appendix II.
19. Quoted from an unsigned Foreign Office minute of Thursday 12 December 1935 (registry number J 9106/1/1, PRO file number F.O. 371/19168). This clause was deleted from the version approved by the Cabinet and consequently is not to be found either in Cabinet Paper 235(35) (Appendix II) or in the White Paper on Ethiopia (Appendix IV). For an explanation of this somewhat obscure matter, see Appendix III.
20. Arnold Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs 1935, volume ii, pp. 300-301.
21. Templewood, p. 182.
22. See above, p. 192. In a letter to Baldwin dated 22 December 1935, Hoare wrote, 'I believe I have succeeded in doing what you wanted me to do. I have kept the country out of war.' (Cross, pp. 261-262)
23. Speech in the House of Commons on 19 December 1935. Quoted from Parliamentary Debates. Official Report. Fifth Series. Volume 307.
24. Peterson, p. 119. He claims that Laval was in daily contact with Mussolini over the telephone. Hoare wrote (Templewood, p. 179), 'More than once he rang up Mussolini with whom he seemed to have a direct line.' Vansittart (The Mist Procession, p. 540) was also certain that Laval was in daily touch with the Italian leader.
25. Telegram from Clerk to Hoare, 15 December 1935 (registry number J 9439/1/1, PRO file number CAB 21/412), reproduced in Appendix II.
26. For example, on 8 December, Sir Charles Mendl, the Press Secretary at the British Embassy in Paris, wrote to Vansittart (document available in PRO file number CAB 63/50):

Even if M. Laval and the French Government give every assurance that in the event of a mad-dog incident occurring, they will be with us in every way, and in spite of the fact that 'Etats-Major' are going to work together, no French Government - in view of the past three months' preparation of public opinion in the contrary sense - can in my opinion 'deliver the goods'. There would, in my considered opinion, be riots and almost civil war here.

It is sad to write, but none the less true. Perhaps no one, not even Léger, will dare to tell you this, for they regret it so much and in a great many cases are ashamed of it, but the moment is so grave that I think this eventuality must be taken into most serious consideration.



27. No mention occurs in the records of the possibility that Ethiopia might reject the terms. Presumably, it was felt either that Haile Selassie would have to accept or that any rejection on his part would cause the blame for the continuation of war to fall upon him - thus allowing the League to abandon Ethiopia and letting Britain, and France, off the horns of their dilemma. Similarly, as Laval stated during the first day of talks, the negotiators appear to have assumed that the League of Nations would approve of any Anglo-French proposals.

28. Cross, p. 247.

Chapter Eight

The Third Decision Situation:

The Hoare-Laval Crisis



The Hoare-Laval Plan presented the British Government with an occasion for decision that began for them the third decision situation of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. For twelve days, they wrestled with the problems caused by the Paris peace proposals. At the end of that period, both their foreign policy and their domestic prestige lay in shambles.

Sunday 8 December

Sunday evening, a very uneasy Anthony Eden went to speak to Stanley Baldwin.<sup>1</sup> During the day, information from Paris had gradually trickled into London. In the morning, the record of Saturday's discussions and the text of the same night's communiqué had arrived at the Foreign Office. Later on, two further telegrams had come from the Foreign Secretary. In the first, he had expressed satisfaction with the progress of the talks; in the second, he had asked - without any further explanation - that the Cabinet be convened on Monday. Perturbed by these developments, Eden crossed Downing Street to consult with the Prime

Minister. That afternoon at Chequers, Baldwin had also received a message from Hoare requesting a Cabinet meeting on Monday,<sup>2</sup> but he was equally puzzled as to why. He knew nothing else and agreed that they ought to try to get more information from Paris. Accordingly, Eden returned to the Foreign Office and telephoned to the British Embassy. By this time, the conversations at the Quai d'Orsay had ended, and the secretary to whom he spoke informed him that Hoare was resting and Vansittart, staying as usual at the Ritz, was unavailable for comment. Asked for some further indication of what was going on, the secretary went to inquire and returned in a minute or two with the message that both the Foreign Secretary and the Permanent Undersecretary were 'well satisfied with the day's work', that Hoare was about to leave for Switzerland, and that Peterson was travelling overnight to London with a full record of the talks.

Eden rang back to Baldwin to report. They were not reassured by the latest news. They had not expected the Foreign Secretary to stay overnight in Paris;<sup>3</sup> but they now knew that he had done so, and they worried about what else he might have done that required so urgent a Cabinet meeting. They agreed, however, that they could do nothing but await Peterson's arrival in the morning. Meanwhile, Eden 'drew comfort from the fact that Hoare was continuing his journey to Switzerland for his holiday, which hardly seemed to indicate any exceptional event'.

Eden was wrong. In retrospect, Baldwin admitted that they ought to have found out more about what was actually happening in the French capital.<sup>4</sup> Had they done so - had they insisted upon talking personally to Hoare or Vansittart, or even to Clerk or Peterson - they might have forestalled the disasters of the next eleven days. They did not do so. The Hoare-Laval crisis had begun.



Monday 9 December

Monday morning brought confirmation for Eden and Baldwin of their anxieties. Peterson arrived at the former's house just before breakfast with two documents.<sup>5</sup> The first was Hoare's letter summarizing the situation and advising the Cabinet to act at once upon his suggestions. The second was the Hoare-Laval Plan itself, consisting of four hastily drafted pages, written in French, and initialled 'S.H., P.L.'. Eden was surprised that the Foreign Secretary, being merely competent in French, had not insisted upon a translation. He was absolutely astonished by the actual proposals. He felt that they could not be reconciled either with the recommendations of the Committee of Five or with the instructions previously given Peterson.<sup>6</sup> Eden also found it remarkable that Peterson had not brought any verbatim record of Sunday's conversations, which he had not attended and upon which he could shed little light.<sup>7</sup> Later in the morning, at the Foreign Office, Eden explained the situation in detail to Baldwin. Afterwards, when the Prime Minister asked him what he thought, Eden replied that he was troubled but that two things were clear. Neither Haile Selassie nor the League would accept these terms. 'Baldwin grunted and looked unhappy and commented: "That lets us out, doesn't it?" but he agreed that the Cabinet must meet that evening and seemed as uncertain as myself why Hoare had suddenly done this thing.'

Though puzzled in general, Eden was clear on one point. With Hoare in Switzerland, he now became effective head of the Foreign Office with the responsibility for implementing the proposals. He wanted, however, to resign and to have nothing to do with them. He did not do so partly because of the uncertainty about the fate of the Plan and partly because,

as Hoare's 'Siamese twin' in the system of dual responsibility at the Foreign Office, he felt he could not abandon his colleague without knowing in any detail the reasons behind the latter's actions. Nevertheless, what he could and did do was to begin to alter both the nature of the Plan and the procedures for handling it. After taking care to consult Baldwin and obtain approval for what he intended to do, Eden spoke that afternoon to Vansittart in Paris and arranged three changes. First, he wanted the proposals communicated simultaneously to Mussolini and Haile Selassie. Second, he insisted that Britain and France not pressure the Eighteen to postpone their meeting scheduled for Thursday. Third, he deleted the clause banning Ethiopian construction of a railway. This had been included in the draft brought by Peterson and in the initial text of the Cabinet Paper circulated early in the day, but it did not appear in the later, official version which the Cabinet actually considered.

The issue of the railway eventually proved an acute embarrassment to the Government, but Eden's two procedural changes overshadowed it greatly in immediate importance. Though eminently 'fair', they reduced the possibility of the peace proposal's succeeding. Hoare and Laval had wished to present Haile Selassie with the *fait accompli* of Italian approval, in order either to ensure acceptance of the compromise or to transfer all blame for any failure away from Italy and onto Ethiopia - thereby, they hoped, avoiding the oil embargo and saving Stresa without destroying the League. Eden's alterations weakened the force of this arrangement. Simultaneous communication of the terms to both parties not only meant a delay - in order to gain French agreement - in a process highly dependent upon speed but also meant an increase in the chance of a leak (perhaps an intentional one) and of a consequent outcry.



of public opinion. If the Emperor learned of the details before Mussolini accepted them, he could get in first with a rejection or a qualified acceptance and blunt the effect plotted in Paris. Moreover, by refusing to countenance the postponement of the meeting of the Eighteen, Eden was providing the League with a similar opportunity to turn down the proposals, or at least express its displeasure, before Britain and France could pressure, undoubtedly successfully, the Committee of Five into giving them its imprimatur. Thus, by altering the procedure and reducing the chances of the Plan's success, Eden, with Baldwin's backing, had made the first crucial decision of the Hoare-Laval crisis.

Public reaction to the proposals began in London in the afternoon. The evening papers printed versions of the peace terms that they had picked up from the morning press in Paris. In the House of Commons, the Government neither confirmed nor denied these stories, and in response to questioning from reporters Baldwin would only say that matters were under consideration and that he should prefer not to make any further statement at the moment. This lack of any denial troubled the Government's supporters in Parliament, who felt that the reports, even if only generally correct, went far beyond anything yet put to them for approval.<sup>8</sup>

Ministers themselves shared this unease. They met that evening at six o'clock in an atmosphere of almost unrelieved gloom.<sup>9</sup> They knew that they had immediately either to accept or to reject the Hoare-Laval Plan; they feared the costs likely to result from either course; and

they possessed scant information on which to base their decision. Only three Cabinet Papers were circulated. The first consisted of the record of Saturday's conversations in Paris.<sup>10</sup> The second contained the two documents which Peterson had brought in the morning: the text of the Hoare-Laval Plan and the Foreign Secretary's letter to the Cabinet.<sup>11</sup> (Both of these Cabinet Papers are reproduced in Appendix II). The third was a very pessimistic report from the Board of Trade on the subject of oil supplies for Italy. It stated that a complete embargo, though likely to prove effective, would depend primarily upon the whole-hearted commitment of the government of the United States, which was not a member of the League of Nations.<sup>12</sup> The Cabinet possessed no other documents. They consulted no other sources of information. They 'probably met in greater ignorance than on any other occasion between the wars'.<sup>13</sup>

Baldwin opened the meeting. He informed the assembled Ministers that he had summoned them at the Foreign Secretary's request, and he read them a personal letter from Hoare which Peterson had given him that morning. In it, after having stressed the urgency of the matter and the importance of keeping in line with the French, the Foreign Secretary had written that an agreement had been reached, that it was essential to approve it immediately, and that his colleagues at the Embassy had assured him that it was the best thing he had ever done.<sup>14</sup>

Eden then explained the situation. First, he asked for approval of the two changes in procedure which, with Baldwin's assent, he had already begun to arrange. As the new terms went a good deal further than those of the Committee of Five, it seemed fairer to treat Haile Selassie equally with Mussolini. Sir George Clerk had agreed, and he and Vansittart would try to straighten out this matter with the French. Similarly, the Permanent Undersecretary would arrange that, instead of requesting a postponement of the meeting of the Eighteen, Britain and



France would inform the Committee of their attempt at a solution to the conflict and ask them to refer the matter to the Five. The increased risk of a leak, he noted, no longer mattered as the French had already allowed the proposals to become known to their press.<sup>15</sup> If this suggested course of action was adopted, the Eighteen would most probably adjourn and postpone any consideration of the oil embargo.

Eden next made use of maps and of some extra information gleaned from Peterson to explain the terms in great detail. He pointed out that, according to a message he had received from Laval, the French intended to interpret them as generously towards Mussolini as possible. Finally, Eden supported Hoare's recommendations. He did so not because he liked them, but because of the Foreign Secretary's reputation for caution and shrewdness, because of his own feeling that something - as yet unknown in London - must have happened in Paris, and because of loyalty to his colleague. Though Eden later regretted this loyalty, it led him at the time, despite his initial impulse to resign and despite his dislike for the terms, to advise the Cabinet to accept the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>16</sup>

He added, however, a cautionary note. He warned that certain League members would find the proposals very distasteful, and he expressed serious reservations about French support in the event of Italian aggression. Laval had stated that France would honour her obligations but had added that sanctions were unpopular with an important section of opinion. Eden thought that fear of French unreliability - especially if Italy approved the Plan while Ethiopia turned it down - had undoubtedly influenced the Foreign Secretary. Hence, Eden further recommended that the Emperor be pressed to accept the Plan as a basis for discussion - or at least not to reject it out of hand.<sup>17</sup>



The Cabinet next discussed the situation at length. While some Ministers approved the proposals (for example, Monsell, the First Lord of the Admiralty, who though absent conveyed his support via Baldwin<sup>18</sup>), the majority disliked both the Hoare-Laval Plan and the probable effects of accepting it. They recognized that the situation could prove very satisfactory if all three parties to the dispute accepted the terms, but they doubted that the Emperor would give a definite yes, even as a basis for negotiations. If he did not, and both Italy and the League approved the settlement, the Cabinet felt that a very difficult position would arise as the French would feel justified in refusing to co-operate in either future sanctions or their consequences. If both Ethiopia and the League rejected the proposals, the Cabinet believed that the situation would prove equally unfortunate as the League might then be divided over sanctions - with similar results - and the Government would have to completely reconsider their position.<sup>19</sup> Ministers also exhibited a marked distaste for the Plan itself. They criticized it on the grounds that the terms of settlement were better for Mussolini than those of the Five, that it would be said that Italy's resort to force had gained her more than she would have otherwise received, and that the sphere of economic exploitation was unduly extended.

Despite some attempt to counter these objections, the Cabinet on the whole demonstrated little enthusiasm for the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, at the end of the meeting, after some seventy minutes of discussion,<sup>21</sup> Ministers finally accepted the peace terms; but they were discontented and apprehensive and hedged their approval. First, they supported the proposals as revised, without any ban on the construction of a railway. Second, they agreed with Eden's changes in procedure and authorized him to clear them immediately with the French. Third, they also agreed with Eden's recommendation that, when the terms were

forwarded to Addis Ababa, an accompanying message to the British Minister resident there should ask him to do his best to persuade Haile Selassie to accept them or at least not to reject them out of hand. Fourth, without any reservations or second thoughts, the Cabinet 'assumed that the decision on the oil sanction would be adjourned'. Finally, they agreed to hold their regular meeting of next Wednesday an hour earlier than usual in order to discuss the situation before Eden left that afternoon for Geneva and the meeting of the Eighteen.<sup>22</sup>

These decisions reflected the uncertainty and tentativeness of Ministers. They were trying to make the best of what they knew to be a bad situation. They were engaged in a salvage operation and only very reluctantly did they eventually approve of the Hoare-Laval Plan. They realized that a rejection of the settlement would force Hoare's resignation: the release of Sunday night's communiqué, the leak in the press, and the initialling of the draft all meant that he had committed himself publically and irrevocably.<sup>23</sup> Any attempt to retain him while at the same time discarding his proposals could only result in a situation where neither Parliament nor foreign governments could or would trust him. The fates of Hoare and his Plan were inseparable. As Baldwin said, they had 'either to ratify or disown Sam'.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, a minority of Ministers, led by Neville Chamberlain, wished to reject the Plan, whatever the cost to the Foreign Secretary. The majority, however, agreed with the Prime Minister that, despite all the arguments against the proposals, they must support them.<sup>25</sup> They felt that they should not condemn a fellow Minister without giving him a chance to defend himself and that they had a duty to stand by a sick and absent colleague.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, after his excellent performance at the India Office, Hoare was, if not warmly liked, certainly greatly respected; his reputation led his colleagues to believe that he must have had good reasons for



what he did. As Halifax wrote: 'And what of course explains - but doesn't justify - what we did was the habit of immense confidence we had rightly developed in him'.<sup>27</sup> The Cabinet also felt, or at least hoped, that the Plan might prove successful in getting negotiations started at Geneva, where the specific details could then be altered.<sup>28</sup> More importantly, the Cabinet feared that an immediate rejection would have antagonized the French and caused Laval to refuse to furnish Britain with any military support in the Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the Cabinet decided to send that extra telegram to Barton in Addis Ababa because they realized that an outright Ethiopian rejection would have provided Laval with a justification for not proceeding with the oil embargo, not implementing any further sanctions, perhaps ending those already in existence, and leaving Britain alone in the lurch. As far as the oil embargo was concerned, its likely postponement neither surprised nor upset the Cabinet, and they were glad to have an excuse to do what they had wanted to do all along. In fact, Neville Chamberlain shortly wrote to his sister that the object of Hoare's stopover in Paris had been to do exactly this:

I believed, and so far as I know, my colleagues believed also, that he was going to stop off at Paris for a few hours on his way to Switzerland, to get the discussions with the French into such a condition that we could say to the League, 'don't prejudice the chances of a favourable issue by thrusting in a particularly provocative extra sanction at this moment'.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the Cabinet's decision to meet earlier than usual on Wednesday reflected both their hesitancy about their support and their expectation that something was bound to happen during the next couple of days.

Ministers' support for their Foreign Secretary, however reluctant, constituted the second crucial decision of the day. They accepted the Hoare-Laval Plan for four reasons. They hoped that the proposals might



lead to negotiation's beginning at Geneva; they feared the effect of a rejection upon Anglo-French relations; and they wanted an excuse for postponing the oil embargo. Most importantly, though, they accepted the Hoare-Laval Plan out of personal sympathy for and loyalty to a respected, absent, and ailing colleague. It can fairly be stated that the majority of the Cabinet agreed to the settlement in spite of their dislike both for its terms and for its probable consequences.

After the Cabinet, Eden returned to the Foreign Office to begin to implement the Plan as altered. He immediately telephoned Vansittart, who anticipated no trouble from Laval over the proposed changes. After dinner, however, Sir Robert reported that the French were creating difficulties and wanted to send a shorter account of the proposals to Haile Selassie. Eden refused. The Cabinet had decided that a full version must be sent. Shortly after midnight, Vansittart phoned again to say that the French would consent only on the condition that Britain agreed to the oil sanction's not being accepted at Geneva. Again Eden refused. Though he knew that the embargo would be postponed, he could not give such an undertaking without consulting Baldwin and gaining Cabinet approval. Vansittart went once more to see Laval. Eden went to bed.<sup>31</sup>

The Hoare-Laval Plan presented the British Government with an exceedingly difficult and unpleasant problem. In response, Ministers made two crucial decisions. They altered the procedures arranged in Paris, and they went ahead and accepted the Hoare-Laval Plan as revised. These decisions proved incompatible. The second ensured a political

uproar. The first made it probable that the Government would not even have a solution to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict to show for their troubles. For the most generous of intentions, for reasons both sensible and compassionate, the Cabinet made a mistake. During the next few days, their error was to lead to catastrophic consequences.

Tuesday 10 December

Tuesday morning, Eden returned to the Foreign Office to continue his argument with the French government.<sup>32</sup> He found and circulated to the Cabinet Vansittart's latest telegram, giving the details of a meeting with Laval at 2 a.m.<sup>33</sup> Anticipating that Haile Selassie would undoubtedly turn down the proposals in order to precipitate the oil sanction, the French Premier had eventually agreed to send them to Addis Ababa only because of British pressure.<sup>34</sup> Considering this a major concession, he had insisted that any rejection must definitely mean no embargo; an Ethiopian refusal coupled with an Italian acceptance would make it impossible for him to persuade his colleagues to consent to any further measures. While he did not want to quarrel over this matter, he believed that in the above circumstances no country would proceed with additional pressure on Italy. Vansittart reported that Laval was not budging from this position and agreed that his argument would probably find a good deal of support outside France: general opinion would not agree 'to apply stick to a country which had accepted the proposals'.

Eden considered Laval's condition on the oil embargo unacceptable. He asked Baldwin to summon a Cabinet for noon and spent the rest of the morning drafting a reply.

When the Cabinet met, they had a somewhat clearer picture of the situation than the previous day.<sup>35</sup> They knew more of Laval's intentions; they appreciated that initial reaction in Parliament had not been favourable, and they understood that, secrecy being impossible, they



would eventually have to consider public opinion. Nonetheless, though not so ignorant, Ministers were no less gloomy than on Monday. They still disliked the Hoare-Laval Plan and continued to be greatly concerned about the consequences of their having accepted it.

Eden opened the meeting by outlining the French Premier's latest demands. Following some general discussion, he distributed his proposed reply.<sup>36</sup> It insisted that early and complete communication of the text to Ethiopia was essential, that it was a matter of fair play, and that it could in no way be interpreted as a French concession to the British point of view. Second, while admitting that an imposition in the near future of an oil embargo was unlikely except in the event of an Italian rejection, Eden's note strongly and definitely refused to agree to drop this measure in advance of the Italian and Ethiopian replies. Unlike Laval, Eden wished to observe at least the niceties of behaviour. The Cabinet agreed completely with the League of Nations Minister and authorized him to proceed as he had outlined.

Ministers next considered the overall situation. Their concerns remained very much the same as on Monday. They feared the consequences of an Italian acceptance and an Ethiopian rejection; and they worried greatly about support in the Mediterranean, Swinton reporting on the very unsatisfactory nature of air discussions with the French which had begun the previous day in Paris: 'it was clear, however, that they intended that the whole brunt of any hostilities should fall upon the British, and that no reliance could be placed upon them'. While some attempts were made, just as at the previous day's meeting, to defend the proposals, the Cabinet continued to dislike them; and Peterson, who attended at Baldwin's request, could add nothing to allay their anxieties.

In fact, the Government confronted an additional problem. Public opinion and the political situation within Britain threatened to pose serious difficulties. Before the Cabinet met, details of the Plan had already appeared in the morning papers, and according to The Times, 'It is believed that in substance the proposals drafted in Paris are:-

1. Italy would receive Danakil and the eastern part of the Tigré, including Adowa and Makale, but not Aksum.
2. Ethiopia would obtain the port of Assab in Eritrea and a corridor to that port through Italian territory, or alternatively the port of Zeila.
3. Italy would receive in the south all the territory included between the frontier of British Somaliland, the eighth parallel of latitude in the north and the thirty-sixth degree of longitude in the west, including most of the Ogaden.
4. Within her new frontiers Ethiopia would preserve her full independence and would receive League assistance for her development and the carrying out of necessary reforms.

(This outline, though correct for the north, ceded Italy outright in the south what she would only have received in a more roundabout way through the proposed zone of economic expansion and colonization.) The Manchester Guardian printed substantially the same version and added that out of Ethiopia's 350,000 square miles of territory, 150,000 were to become Italian. Its editorial was incredulous:

The first impression of the reported 'peace terms' agreed on by Sir Samuel Hoare and M. Laval in Paris is that there must have been some mistake; these are surely not the Anglo-French proposals but the maximum terms of Mussolini.... It is impossible to believe it.... Such terms could never be granted by Abyssinia and could hardly be won by Italy in ten years' war. For the moment we can only believe that the Paris reports must be untrue and that full details will remove the present painful impression.

Eden informed his colleagues that the press were asking for guidance and wanted to know if the Government had agreed to anything. Baldwin

added that the Leader of the Opposition had already served notice that he would ask that afternoon whether, before the Government took any further action, they would inform the House of the nature of the proposals to which they had committed themselves.

Thus, at the end of the meeting, having already dealt with French obstruction, Ministers had to decide how to handle a potentially adverse domestic reaction. They wanted to avoid or at least delay this incipient outburst. They agreed that Eden should tell the press that no proposals had yet been submitted to Italy or Ethiopia but that details of procedure were being discussed with the French. They also decided to respond to Attlee's question by saying that nothing had yet been presented to either of the warring parties and that it would be premature to make any further statement at the present. If a supplementary was asked regarding when such a statement would be made, the answer should be if and when the appropriate League committee authorized publication of any suggested settlement. Finally, if the Opposition wanted a debate, the Prime Minister should try to arrange that it not take place before the following Tuesday. In so far as possible, given the press reports, the Cabinet wished to preserve secrecy. They instructed Baldwin and Eden to stall.

Tuesday's meeting served primarily to confirm the decisions taken on Monday. Ministers were still supporting the Foreign Secretary, still attempting to alter the procedure for handling the Plan, still worrying about French support, and still assuming, though unwilling to promise unconditionally to Laval, that the oil embargo would be postponed. In addition, they were now trying to ensure that they would not have to confront the wrath of public and Parliament before they had dealt with Geneva.



They failed. That afternoon during question time in the House of Commons, Attlee refused to be fobbed off by the Cabinet's authorized answer to his query, and he pressed for more information. Baldwin did his best to mollify the Leader of the Opposition, promising both a White Paper and a debate as soon as possible and in any event before the Christmas recess; but Attlee would not accept any delay and stated that the Labour Party intended to raise the matter later in the day - which they could easily do as the House was scheduled that evening to debate the reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Towards half past seven, Labour began a debate on the Hoare-Laval Plan. It was an absolute debacle for the Government. The criticisms of the proposals - as published in The Times<sup>37</sup> - proved difficult to answer and very much to the point: that they violated the Covenant; that they contradicted the pledges given by Hoare at Geneva and by him and Eden to the House; that they gave Mussolini far more than he had so far gained by war; that they favoured Italy more than those offered before the invasion; that they were grossly unfair, particularly with respect to the so-called exchange of territory; and most importantly that the honour of the Government lay at stake: they had called an election over this issue and won a great victory on the basis of their affirmations of support for the League and its principles - and they now intended to renege on their promises.

Neither Eden nor Baldwin succeeded in refuting the main objections. The former fared rather better. While pleading the unavoidability of secrecy at this stage, he stated that 'considerable inaccuracies' existed in the press reports. He then justified the idea of the negotiations and defended the proposals not on any specific detail but on their three main principles:

An exchange of territory, conveying definite advantages to both sides; League assistance to Ethiopia for the purpose of social, economic and administrative developments; special facilities for Italian settlers and Italian companies in connection with that economic development. Those are the three principles upon which these proposals were based.

Eden assured members that the proposals, being only recommendations, would not be imposed upon any party to the dispute, and he asked the House to trust the Government in these difficult matters.

In contrast, Baldwin's speech was muddled and confused. It was an abject failure. Though he denied any underhandedness or attempt to impose terms of settlement, he conceded that the press reports were fairly accurate and, unlike Eden, made no attempt to indicate that they differed significantly from the actual Paris terms. He then went on to damn the League with faint praise and to admit that the oil sanction would have to be reconsidered - hardly an approach guaranteed to win him the approbation of the House. His ultimate defence rested upon the necessity of secrecy, and he astonished Parliament with two of the most enigmatic sentences ever uttered by a Prime Minister:

I have seldom spoken with greater regret, for my lips are not yet unsealed. Were these troubles over I would make a case, and I guarantee that not a man would go into the lobby against us.

Baldwin made no attempt to explain what he meant, and he later admitted that this remark was 'one of the stupidest things I ever said'.<sup>38</sup> He was referring to various aspects of the situation that he felt he could not state openly in the House. He meant the danger of war, the menace to the fleet from Italian small craft operating in an enclosed area, the ability of Italian bombers to reach London, the drastic shortage of anti-aircraft ammunition, and the threat from Germany.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, though he felt morally certain that Mussolini had bought Laval,<sup>40</sup> he also knew that he could not stand up in Parliament and say that



France would desert Britain at the first sign of hostilities. Baldwin was correct in his judgement of what he could openly say, but his actual remark was a tremendous blunder. It aggravated the climate of discontent in the House of Commons and provided a boon to cartoonists who portrayed the Prime Minister with his lips taped together. The entire debate proved catastrophic for the Government. They failed to make even a half-convincing case for their actions and succeeded only in worsening their own position. Not a single one of their own supporters attempted to defend them.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, as the House pilloried the Government and the press began to express its criticism, more bad news arrived from Paris and helped to confirm Ministers' fears. Vansittart had spoken to Georges Mandel, the prominent politician, and General Gamelin, chief of staff, both of whom had said that, while opinion was moving towards the British position, London must have patience for the moment and co-operate with Paris.<sup>42</sup> Vansittart also reported that Cerutti had warned him that an oil embargo meant war,<sup>43</sup> and Clerk passed on a message which his Ethiopian colleague had just received from Addis Ababa: the Ethiopian government would reject any proposals which rewarded Italian aggression and ignored the principles of the League of Nations.<sup>44</sup>

Later in the evening, some less depressing tidings finally arrived. Vansittart informed London that he and Clerk had presented the Government's views to Laval at six o'clock and that the French Premier, while evidently disappointed, had ultimately allowed that the British must judge the situation with respect to an oil embargo in the light of actual circumstances - such as their belief in the sincerity of any



acceptance of the proposals by Mussolini - and could not commit themselves in advance.<sup>45</sup>

The French and British positions now ostensibly in accord, the Foreign Office proceeded late Tuesday evening to send telegrams simultaneously to the Ambassador in Rome and the Minister in Addis Ababa instructing each to make known, without publication and jointly with his French colleague, the terms of the Hoare-Laval Plan to the Italian and Ethiopian governments. Another despatch, sent only to Barton, told him to urge the Emperor to accept the proposals. All of these telegrams had been authorized by the Cabinet and were to be included in the White Paper that was to be released the following Saturday (Appendix IV).

Barton, however, received an extra message, not approved by the Cabinet, not sent to Drummond in Rome, and not to be included in the White Paper. It informed him that Britain and France intended, 'at an appropriate moment', to obtain from Haile Selassie an undertaking not to build a railway to his promised port. On Monday, Eden had deleted this clause from the Plan, and it did not appear in the version considered and accepted by Ministers. Nevertheless, for some inexplicable reason, this telegram was sent to the British Minister in Ethiopia. Eden took this action entirely on his own authority (see Appendix III). His rationale is unknown and defies conjecture.

While the Cabinet were attempting to recover from the shock of the Foreign Secretary's actions, Sir Samuel Hoare himself lay flat on his back in Switzerland. He had arrived in Zuz Monday afternoon and gone figure skating - a sport at which he fancied his abilities - the following morning. While on the ice, he had suffered a fainting spell,

fallen, and badly broken his nose in two places. His doctor declared that due to the danger of infection he was on no account to travel for two or three days.<sup>46</sup>

The Foreign Secretary's absence from London had been a major factor in the Cabinet's decisions on Monday. His accident meant that he could not return before the weekend. The Government would now have to continue to deal with the international and domestic consequences of the Hoare-Laval Plan without the presence and advice of the man responsible for and most knowledgeable about it.

Wednesday 11 December

Wednesday morning, information from at home and abroad began to demonstrate to the Government the extent of the distaste for the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>47</sup> From Washington, the Ambassador reported that if these terms were final they would nullify any efforts that the United States government might make to influence opinion in support of collective action.<sup>48</sup> In Geneva, unofficial accounts of the proposals greatly upset delegates to the League.<sup>49</sup> And Malcolm MacDonald received objections from the majority of the Dominions High Commissioners.<sup>50</sup> Even within the French government dissension existed. At a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday, Herriot, leader of the Radicals upon whom Laval depended for his majority in the Chamber, had vigorously disagreed with the Premier's contention that an Ethiopian rejection would make the continuation of sanctions unjustifiable.<sup>51</sup>

Comment in the papers ranged from the outraged indignation of the News Chronicle and the Daily Herald to the cautious approval of the Scotsman and the Daily Express. In the middle stood the Daily Telegraph, which described the settlement as bearing no relationship to the known position in East Africa (see above, page 169, for the abominable quality of war reporting) but which added that the reality of the Italian invasion meant that rigid insistence on a return to the status quo was not the way to peace. The majority of the press, though by no means the totality, opposed the Hoare-Laval Plan, and even those papers which favoured it did so mainly out of a desire for peace rather than from outright support of the actual terms. The Times, while approving of the principles enunciated Tuesday by Eden in the House, objected to the



proposals themselves and warned that any solution 'must not constitute a premium upon armed aggression, or serve as an encouragement to every future lawbreaker'.

At ten o'clock in the morning, the Cabinet met.<sup>52</sup> They had to decide what line to instruct Eden to adopt on Thursday at the meeting of the Committee of Eighteen. Aware of the opposition in the House, in the country, and at Geneva itself, Ministers began to hedge on their support for the Hoare-Laval Plan.

As he had for the past two days, Eden continued to make the running.<sup>53</sup> He hoped that his colleagues would not expect him to champion the proposals in any detail, for, as most delegates to the League had probably already made up their minds, any such attempt would undoubtedly prove futile. He felt that Laval intended to weaken the terms in favour of Mussolini, and he wanted the Cabinet to authorize him to resist this and to ensure that any alterations went in the opposite direction. Eden fully agreed with Neville Chamberlain's suggestion that he might be better off basing any defence upon the three principles which he himself had used in the House during the previous day's debate. With respect to the oil embargo, Eden thought that the Government should support any action which other members of the League were prepared to take, but as a practical matter he believed that the question would be postponed pending replies from Rome and Addis Ababa - and, as Neville Chamberlain again added, the attitude of the United States.

Discussion continued on the oil sanction. Baldwin stated that the effectiveness of this measure was an important consideration, and he emphasized several times that the question ought to be decided as a

business proposition and the embargo not undertaken till the Government could be certain that it would work. He felt United States co-operation to be crucial and believed that Britain should not do anything until they knew the intentions of the American government. The Cabinet debated the problem and expressed various opinions, one Minister suggesting that politically the important point was to avoid giving the impression of pusillanimity as this would be disastrous to British prestige. The dominant view was that Britain should maintain existing sanctions but attempt to avoid an embargo on oil; but 'there was general agreement that the Minister for League of Nations Affairs must not say that we would in no circumstances agree to the imposition of an oil sanction at some future date, or that recent events had removed sanctions altogether from the field of action'.

The Cabinet reached no formal conclusions, but Maurice Hankey, the Secretary, drafted a summary of the discussion (included in the minutes) and handed it to Eden just prior to his departure at two for Geneva. It reflected the attitude of Ministers and constituted a set of informal instructions. The Cabinet, as Baldwin pointed out, agreed with the line which Eden himself had suggested at the outset of the meeting. They also approved of the Prime Minister's caution - undoubtedly an example of closing the stable door - that if Eden found himself in a difficult position he should refer to London for further instructions.

For the third day in a row, the Cabinet followed the lead given by Baldwin and Eden. Already, the latter had insisted upon altering the procedures and recommended, despite misgivings, acceptance of the terms. In both cases, Baldwin had fully backed him, and the Prime Minister had himself taken the lead in defending Hoare and in arguing against implementing the oil embargo. At today's meeting, Eden, again supported by Baldwin, guided the Cabinet in making the third crucial decision of the



Hoare-Laval crisis: though still supporting the Foreign Secretary, Ministers began to hedge on his proposals. They agreed with Eden's recommendation that he should be circumspect at Geneva and should not advocate the Plan, especially in detail. They also approved of Baldwin's reluctance to proceed with the oil embargo - although they emphasized that Eden must be careful not to say this. As one Minister said, 'Eden has been told to tell the League that we shall not press them to accept it [the Hoare-Laval Plan], i.e. we shall ask them to reject it'.<sup>54</sup> It was a retreat.

In the afternoon, opposition continued in the House of Commons. Pressed during question time, Baldwin, who had assumed temporary responsibility for the Foreign Office in the absence of Hoare, Eden, and Vansittart,<sup>55</sup> gave no substantive answers and refused to commit himself or the Government in any respect on the subject of the Paris proposals. He did, however, say that Britain would not engage in any unilateral embargo on oil and that it was essential to act collectively through the League. Labour did not pursue the debate on foreign affairs, thereby saving the Government further acute embarrassment; but Vyvyan Adams, an extreme left-wing Conservative, tabled the first motion of censure: that the House did not assent to any settlement granting the aggressor more concessions now after her aggression than she could have previously received by peaceful negotiations.<sup>56</sup> 'The feeling in the House,' Harold Nicolson noted in his diary, 'is still enraged against the Laval agreement.'<sup>57</sup>

And the editor of The Times recorded in his diary: 'Public indignation growing over Paris Peace Plan. A bad press for the Government... and a volume of letters'.<sup>58</sup> Opposition was increasing, and the Cabinet



led by Baldwin and Eden had started to back down. They no longer wanted Geneva merely to modify the Plan; they were now beginning to hope that the League would actually reject it and save them from the unfortunate consequences of their own and their Foreign Secretary's actions. Of course, a League rejection coupled with an Italian acceptance threatened to activate another of the Cabinet's fears - French refusal to provide any further co-operation. As of Wednesday, however, this worry began to fade away in the light of the greater domestic political danger likely to result from continued approval of the Paris peace proposals.

A Very Long Weekend

Thursday 12 December - Sunday 15 December

During these four days from Thursday to Sunday, with no Cabinet meetings to attend and no decisions to make, Ministers, except for Eden at Geneva, enjoyed a respite of sorts. In private, however, they became increasingly alarmed about the mounting opposition at home and abroad.

From their own embassies and from the foreign correspondents of The Times, the Government continued to learn of international reaction. Only in Germany was there unrestrained glee,<sup>59</sup> while in Canada<sup>60</sup> and Belgium<sup>61</sup> feelings were mixed. Otherwise, the information reaching London was overwhelmingly negative. British diplomats in the four Scandinavian countries, in Holland, in South Africa, and in Yugoslavia all described the horror at the proposals.<sup>62</sup> In Moscow, Pravda objected strongly;<sup>63</sup> and from Washington, the Ambassador reported that the press, although hesitant pending official disclosure, were cynical, and he anticipated that Congress would now incline more towards an assertion of neutral rights rather than neutral duties.<sup>64</sup> Even in France much opposition existed. Among the newspapers, those of the left opposed the settlement, while those which were pro-Italian and of the right supported it. In the lobbies of the Chamber, Socialist and Radical deputies voiced considerable criticism,<sup>65</sup> and two left-wing leaders, Mm. Cot and Blum, called for a debate the following week.<sup>66</sup> Herriot himself unrestrainedly expressed his disapproval to all comers<sup>67</sup> (although, as The Times pointedly noted, it apparently had not occurred to him

before the terms had been submitted that, given his position, a practical remedy had lain in his hands).<sup>68</sup>

At Geneva, too, the prevalent feeling was an intense dislike of the Hoare-Laval Plan. Eden arrived there Thursday morning, talked to the Secretary General and various delegates, and cabled that the 'impression which [the] Paris proposals have made upon opinion here is even worse than I had anticipated'. Vasconcellos warned of their devastating effect upon the Eighteen; and the Spanish, Dutch, Greek, and Yugoslav representatives all expressed their dismay.<sup>69</sup>

In this atmosphere, Eden followed his instincts and his flexible instructions and avoided any hint of support for the Hoare-Laval Plan. The Eighteen met on Thursday and immediately dropped the idea of transferring, as had been intended in Paris, responsibility to the Committee of Five. Eden, as well as the Turkish and Polish delegates, (all members of the Five) had objected to this procedure. Instead, the Eighteen continued to meet, and it was to them that Laval defended his actions. He claimed that the search for a compromise was perfectly legitimate, that the negotiations had been public knowledge and quite above board, and that the League had at the beginning of November approved the Anglo-French discussions. These, he continued, had produced the Paris proposals; and it was now up to the League, to whom they would shortly be communicated (this was actually done on Friday), to decide how to proceed. Eden spoke next and adopted a very different tone. He, too, mentioned the approval of the League for the Anglo-French endeavours, but he stressed that that approval was not an official mandate but only an expression of goodwill. Then, barely concealing his dislike of the terms, he practically invited the League to reject them. They



are neither definitive nor sacrosanct. They are suggestions which it is hoped may make possible the beginning of negotiations. If the League does not agree with these suggestions we shall make no complaint. Indeed, we cordially welcome any suggestions for their improvement.

The Eighteen then decided, and confirmed at a second meeting on Friday, that they could do nothing further but wait upon the decision of the Council, which would meet next Wednesday to consider the Anglo-French proposals. Vasconcellos stated that he would reconvene the Eighteen as soon as the situation warranted and in any case at an early date.<sup>70</sup>

Anthony Eden had performed his task well. He had ably conducted the British retreat and managed to ensure that the procedures adopted at Geneva conformed closely to the Cabinet's wishes. The Eighteen had adjourned without discussing the oil embargo, which in consequence could not be implemented for quite some time yet - if at all;<sup>70a</sup> and the onus for any decision on the Plan now fell onto the Council of the League, who were made aware that Britain would not object in the least to their turning it down. Eden had begun publically to disassociate the Government from the actions of their Foreign Secretary.

Eden had also, shortly after his arrival in Geneva on Thursday, rung up Hoare to inform him of the deteriorating political situation in London and to recommend that he return as soon as possible. Sir Samuel received the same advice from Rex Leeper, head of the news department at the Foreign Office, who telephoned to Zuoz, found Hoare surprised at the uproar, and suggested that in his own best interests he come home at once.<sup>71</sup> However, the Foreign Secretary remained sanguine and 'did not appear to consider the need so urgent'.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, the Italian government began to consider their position. Wednesday afternoon, the British and French Ambassadors submitted the proposals to Mussolini. Drummond reported that, though he had been unable to extract either a definite date for a reply or an indication

of its probable nature, both he and Chambrun agreed that the Italian leader, while still undecided, would accept in principle provided that the threat of an oil embargo could be overcome.<sup>73</sup> Officially, a communiqué released after the presentation of the Plan said only that it was being considered.<sup>74</sup> Unofficially, however, optimism prevailed. While informed opinion showed more caution than the general public, it appeared that, despite certain disappointment with the settlement, Italy would accept it.<sup>75</sup>

In Addis Ababa, the Hoare-Laval Plan was not formally submitted to Ethiopia until Friday morning, two days later than to Italy. A 'faulty wireless' at the French Embassy caused the delay: in this at least Laval had finally managed to have his way. No official response came, and neither Barton nor his French colleague were 'sanguine as to the Emperor's reaction'; Barton himself believed that Haile Selassie would not commit himself to an answer until after he knew the League's attitude.<sup>76</sup> In fact, the Emperor was attempting to finesse the issue by shifting any responsibility for a rejection to Geneva - just as the British were doing. Already on Wednesday, the Ethiopian Minister in Paris had sent the Secretary General a letter interpreting the proposals (the leaked version of course) to mean that they asked the victim to cede to the aggressor one half [sic] of its national territory directly and the other half in a disguised form pending further annexation. Ethiopia, this note said, had always been willing to participate in peace negotiations under League auspices, but before making any reply she wished the Assembly to convene so that every state could express its opinion, because the survival of the League hung in the balance and the Ethiopian government did not want to set a harmful precedent whereby any member nation would not be able in the future to ask for and receive a full public hearing. On Friday evening, the Secretary General replied



that as the Council had jurisdiction no decision could be taken on the Ethiopian request until after it met next Wednesday.<sup>77</sup> Despite this rebuff, the Ethiopian stratagem had accomplished one important purpose: Haile Selassie now possessed a very good excuse for declining to give an immediate answer to the Hoare-Laval Plan. He could wait upon the League of Nations.

Within Britain, during these four days, an enormous wave of hostility threatened to engulf the Government. Public reaction was 'first stupefaction, then shame and anger'.<sup>78</sup> Attlee condemned the proposals and accused the Prime Minister of cynically campaigning on a platform of support for the League and then reverting to his former beliefs after having won the election.<sup>79</sup> Friday evening, a delegation from the League of Nations Union (including Lord Robert Cecil and Sir Austen Chamberlain) presented Baldwin with a resolution urging the Government to continue sanctions and not to support any settlement which failed to make it clear that aggression did not pay.<sup>80</sup> The Dean of Manchester in a sermon on Sunday night compared the Government to the false prophets of the Old Testament.<sup>81</sup> The King himself was sufficiently concerned to send his secretary to see the editor of The Times. The two men walked over to Downing Street, and Dawson looked in on the House, 'which was in a ferment'.<sup>82</sup> A letter to the Foreign Office described the City as unanimously opposed to the Hoare-Laval Plan, and the Thursday afternoon markets were weak because of fears of a political crisis. The City felt that France should have been left to propose such terms alone, and even a number of anti-Ethiopian diehards believed 'better a war with Italy than the loss of our leadership in Europe and of the Government's reputation at home'.<sup>83</sup> In his

editorial in The Times on Friday, Dawson wrote that 'from nearly every representative and independent newspaper throughout the country, as might be seen from the excerpts given in these columns yesterday, comes the same warning in various tones' about the depth and strength of feeling in Britain; and on Saturday Dawson added that the publication that morning of the full text of the proposals in the White Paper (see Appendix IV) only confirmed their unfairness.<sup>84</sup>

Of course, opinion was not unanimous. On Sunday, the Observer applauded the Plan as the only possible alternative to a European war which would end with nazi domination of the continent and Japanese domination of Asia, but this support was an exception. The terms did not receive much approbation.

Though the Cabinet did not meet during these four days, Ministers saw each other informally and some at least were apprehensive. J.H. Thomas, for one, thought that it was the worst thing that had happened in his experience.<sup>85</sup> Eden returned from Geneva late Saturday night to find opposition mounting steeply and even the Foreign Office divided.<sup>86</sup> On Sunday, Baldwin consulted with both Eden and Neville Chamberlain,<sup>87</sup> and the latter wrote to his sister:

Nothing could be worse than our position. Our whole prestige in foreign affairs at home and abroad has tumbled to pieces like a house of cards. If we had to fight the election over again, we should probably be beaten.<sup>88</sup>

The Prime Minister himself thought developments so grave as to warrant his sending a firm summons to the Foreign Secretary ordering him to return to London.<sup>89</sup>

Of all the problems confronting the Government, the rising tide of discontent within the House of Commons posed the greatest threat. Members were receiving a flood of correspondence, and the publication of the White Paper neither allayed their anxieties nor alleviated their distaste for the proposals.<sup>90</sup> In response to Labour's request for a debate, Baldwin agreed to set aside the coming Thursday for that purpose,<sup>91</sup> and backbenchers were hoping that this debate would clear away some of the fog surrounding the situation.<sup>92</sup> But the crucial development was the fact that the Government's own supporters were turning against them. There grew over the weekend a movement among Conservative M.P.s for the resignation of Sir Samuel Hoare and his replacement as Foreign Secretary by Sir Austen Chamberlain, as an elder statesman who would restore foreign confidence in Britain.<sup>93</sup>

On Sunday, Sir Austen himself wrote:

Laval has behaved treacherously, but I fear that Sam Hoare has blundered badly. I don't know what part I shall take in Thursday's debate nor even how I shall vote. Much will depend on the speeches of Hoare and S.B., but they will have an extraordinarily difficult task, for I have never known the political sky cloud over so suddenly nor have I seen blacker clouds on the horizon. Dismay is not too strong a word to use for the feeling among their supporters when the news leaked out, and nothing that has happened since has reassured them. Baldwin spoke very frankly to the four of us who went as a League of Nations Union deputation, and Vansittart gave me even more details, but there was nothing to comfort one in what they had to say.

I am left with the feeling that when all is said and done, and when they have told the House all that they must now tell it and the world, it is still impossible to regard Hoare's action in allowing himself to be associated with the French proposals and to recommend them as other than a bad blunder. If the elections were just about to begin, instead of being just over, the Government would not get half their present majority. It is



certain that the Cabinet themselves were wholly unprepared for such developments, and I can only explain Hoare's actions by the fact that he was absolutely worn out and that his mind did not take in their effect or consequences. It is a tragedy. 94

Monday 16 December

By Monday, one week after the initial decision to accept the Hoare-Laval Plan, the Cabinet found themselves besieged from all sides. At home and abroad, from left to right, and even within the ranks of the Conservative backbenchers, the feeling predominated that the Government had made a horrible mistake. The situation, wrote the Daily Herald, was going 'From Bad to Worse'. The Dominions Secretary received a very strong letter of protest from the government of South Africa.<sup>95</sup> From Moscow, the Ambassador cabled that he had spoken to Litvinov, who had vehemently objected to the proposals;<sup>96</sup> and from Washington, The Times reported that the past week had 'worked grave, if not irreparable, injury upon the cause of American co-operation'. In the City, the weekend brought no weakening of the unanimous disapproval.<sup>97</sup> And discontent continued to grow in the House of Commons, where the Labour Party was almost certain to conduct Thursday's debate on a motion of censure.<sup>98</sup>

None of this reaction was really unexpected. It merely continued the trend evident since last Tuesday. Monday, however, did bring one startling new development.

In a report from Paris, The Times dropped a bombshell. Nothing in the published version of the Hoare-Laval Plan dealt with the use to which Haile Selassie might want to put his promised outlet to the sea; but there was good reason to believe that, had he agreed to negotiate on the proposed basis, he would have been told - certainly after he was too committed to withdraw his assent - that no railway would be permitted to this port. M. Laval, continued The Times, had looked after

French interests with his usual ability: no danger threatened the shareholders of the Addis Ababa-Djibuti railway.

In light of this report, Geoffrey Dawson dropped his normal, measured tone for one of shocked incredulity. He wrote a scathing editorial about 'A Corridor for Camels'. He pointed out that Ethiopian access to the sea was the

one serious make-weight in a singularly ill-balanced project. But the latest news from Paris makes it clear that there was an intention, however far it may have gone, to deprive even this concession of most of its value. The Emperor, we are told, was to be informed 'at a convenient moment' (presumably when he had recovered from the first shock of dismemberment) that he was forbidden to build a railway along his corridor. It was apparently to remain no more than a strip of scrub, restricted to the sort of traffic which had entered Ethiopia from the days of King Solomon, a corridor for camels.... The suggestion seems so incredible, so completely at variance even with the most cynical interpretation of a 'civilizing mission', that its origin should be investigated before there is any fresh attempt at peace terms.

No one, certainly not the editor of The Times, asked publically where the Ethiopians would obtain the resources to build such a railway or why a second outlet to the coast was necessary. Nor did anyone inquire as to why Haile Selassie, who just happened to be a large shareholder in the French line, would want to go into competition with himself.<sup>99</sup> And these points, though correct and unassailable, were irrelevant. The matter was one of principle: the inclusion in a secret deal, already smacking of deviousness and treachery, of a yet more secret clause accompanied by a very underhanded procedure.

This latest news further incensed M.P.s. In the afternoon, a crowded House bombarded Eden with questions. He would not go into any detail and simply reaffirmed that any settlement must be consistent with the Covenant. In a supplementary, Hugh Dalton asked whether the



Government still accepted 'responsibility for these shameful proposals'? Amidst cries of 'answer', Eden remained silent and the Speaker ruled the question out of order.<sup>100</sup>

By Monday evening, with the issue of the camel corridor acting as the last straw, the Government themselves decided to reverse their original decision. Their retreat was developing into a rout. Practically all Ministers, both in and out of the Cabinet, by this time agreed that the proposals were a mistake;<sup>101</sup> and four of the younger members, Elliot, Duff Cooper, Stanley, and Ormsby-Gore, were actually pushing the Parliamentary correspondent of The Times against the Hoare-Laval Plan.<sup>102</sup>

In light of this furor, several Ministers held an informal meeting at nine o'clock in the evening in the Prime Minister's room at the House of Commons.<sup>103</sup> Present were Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald, Neville Chamberlain, Simon, Duff Cooper, Swinton, Runciman, Monsell, and Eden. They intended to conduct a preliminary discussion, prior to Tuesday's full Cabinet, of what line to follow Wednesday at Geneva. First, though, Eden gave an explanation, obtained from Vansittart, of the camel corridor (see Appendix III). Then, he handed round a draft of the statement he proposed to make at the opening of the Council. While he would defend the Government's actions in attempting to find a solution, he would invite the Council to reject the actual terms. After considerable discussion, those Ministers present approved this draft for submission to the entire Cabinet the following day. Thus, subject to ratification on the morrow - a pro forma matter given the attendance that evening - the Government had made the fourth crucial decision of the crisis: to reject the Hoare-Laval Plan.

No longer content to ask the League to alter the proposals, or even quietly to bury them, they now agreed with Eden's intention to act as one of the pall bearers. However, as they were soon to find out, they had delayed the funeral for too long.

Tuesday 17 December

Tuesday marked the turning-point of the Hoare-Laval crisis, the watershed between its opening and closing stages. For the past week, both Parliament and public had hurled condemnations at the peace proposals and the Government's decision to support them. Already last Wednesday, the Cabinet had begun to retreat, and Monday evening they had finally decided to reverse their position and reject the Plan. But they had waited too long. Too many unanswered questions existed, and the whole situation, as Halifax later wrote, smacked too much of 'the off-the-stage arrangements of nineteenth century diplomacy'.<sup>104</sup> Harold Nicolson was to express the dominant sentiment when, during this coming Thursday's debate, he stated that British foreign policy deserved to be conducted honourably and openly at Geneva and not in the 'foetid saloons of the Quai d'Orsay'. The Paris proposals were dead, but the fate of the Foreign Secretary and the very survival of the Government now hung in the balance. The Conservative Party was threatening to oust Stanley Baldwin and his Ministry from office. Starting Tuesday and continuing for the next two days, events abroad carried virtually no relevance for the Cabinet's decisions. Even opinion in Britain mattered little. All that really counted was the feeling among the Tory backbenchers. In their hands lay the future of the Government.

Early in the morning, Neville Chamberlain went to talk to the Foreign Secretary. Hoare had flown back to London Monday afternoon and gone directly home, ordered to stay there by his doctor who warned that



if he went to the Cabinet he might pick up a serious infection and not be able to speak in the House on Thursday. Consequently, Hoare being unable to defend himself in person, Chamberlain went to discuss the situation with his close friend in order to report back to the Cabinet. The Foreign Secretary admitted the drawbacks to the Plan but insisted upon attempting to vindicate himself in Parliament. He felt certain that the right course for his speech required him first to explain fully to the House the reasons behind the terms and second to add that Britain and France were acting on behalf of the League of Nations which had the responsibility for accepting or rejecting recommendations that appeared to himself and the French 'to contain the minimum proposals for stopping Mussolini short of the risk of going to war with him'. The Foreign Secretary then began to draft his speech, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer departed to report back to the rest of his colleagues.<sup>105</sup>

The Cabinet met at ten o'clock in the morning.<sup>106</sup> Baldwin explained the early hour as due to Eden's having to catch the two o'clock train for Geneva and wishing first to consult with the Cabinet and with the Foreign Secretary. Chamberlain was at the moment with the latter and would arrive later. The situation, the Prime Minister said, had to be considered from the point of view of the upcoming meeting of the League Council and of the debate in the House of Commons.

Ministers first listened to Eden's explanation of the camel corridor and then to Chamberlain's report on Hoare's proposed speech to Parliament. In neither case were they satisfied with what they heard, and they authorized the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Minister for League of Nations Affairs to speak to the Foreign Secretary and to clear matters up as to the general line to be taken in the debate. They also authorized Baldwin to summon, if necessary,

another meeting in the evening, but he preferred in the excited state of public opinion to defer further discussion until their regular weekly session scheduled for the following day.

The Cabinet could not, however, postpone a decision on what to do at Geneva. Eden handed round a draft of his speech to the Council, which effectively recommended that the League reject the peace proposals; and he asked, as he had a week previously, that it be approved as a general guide and not a firm instruction. Chamberlain had already stated that the Foreign Secretary approved of this approach; and Ministers, after taking a short interval to read it, fully agreed with both it and Eden's request for latitude. Thus, they confirmed the decision tentatively made the previous night and completed their retreat on the Hoare-Laval Plan. As far as the oil embargo was concerned, Eden proposed that if the matter were raised at Geneva (my emphasis: the implication being that Eden would not himself raise the issue) he should state that the attitude of the Government had not changed and though still approving in principle they wished to be satisfied that in the existing circumstances it would prove effective. Baldwin stressed the importance of this last consideration and repeated that, 'as he had again and again emphasized', before Britain could agree to this measure the League must examine its practicability. To this was added that the American attitude in particular must be looked into, though Eden thought it preferable for some other nation to raise this point. As with the proposals, the Cabinet fully agreed with Eden's approach to the possibility of the oil embargo. Finally, just before the end of the meeting, they briefly considered the Ethiopian request for summoning the Assembly into session and decided that Eden, while not taking the lead, should attempt to avoid this.



The Cabinet once again followed the advice given by Eden and Baldwin. They reversed their initial decision to approve the Hoare-Laval Plan. Both it and the oil embargo were dead, and Eden at Geneva was to ensure that they were decently and quietly interred, without reflecting ill upon the honour or courage of Britain. However, the Government still planned to support their Foreign Secretary and energetically to defend at least the attempt to find a peaceful settlement.

Such were Baldwin's intentions when at half past eleven he ended the meeting<sup>107</sup> and accompanied Chamberlain and Eden to call upon Hoare. They found him looking miserable. 'I wish I were dead,' he replied when the Prime Minister asked him how he felt. Eden could only stay briefly, and as he left to catch the train from Victoria the Foreign Secretary thanked him for his loyal help.<sup>108</sup> Chamberlain and Baldwin stayed on for an hour and a half. The latter was uncommunicative but commented in parting, 'We all stand together'.<sup>109</sup>

However, as A.J.P. Taylor rather bitingly remarks, Stanley Baldwin did not add that they would all fall together.<sup>110</sup> And what marked this day as a watershed was the emergence of the threat of defeat for the Government and loss of office for the Prime Minister. In the afternoon in the House of Commons, Attlee served notice that the Labour Party would put forward the following motion during Thursday's debate:

That the terms put forward by His Majesty's Government as a basis for an Italo-Abyssinian settlement reward the declared aggressor at the expense of the victim, destroy collective security, and conflict with the expressed will of the country and with the Covenant of the League of Nations, to the support of which the honour of Great Britain is pledged; this House, therefore, demands that these terms be immediately repudiated.



But the real drama of the day occurred behind the scenes in the House of Commons. The challenge came not from the Labour Party's overt opposition, which was expected and merely an annoyance, but from the extraordinary and still rising discontent within Conservative ranks. From left, right, and centre, and not merely from a few radical Tories, came this overwhelming thundering of disapproval.<sup>111</sup> David Margesson, the Conservative Chief Whip, feared that unless the Government jettisoned both Hoare and his proposals they would lose the vote, and he for one wanted the Foreign Secretary to resign.<sup>112</sup> So did Duff Cooper, who approached Neville Chamberlain to report a strong and growing feeling in this direction even within the Cabinet - especially among Elliot, Stanley, Ormsby-Gore, and himself. The Chancellor of the Exchequer replied that it would be unprecedented and improper to demand a Minister's resignation in his absence: the entire Cabinet had accepted responsibility for the proposals, and the House would condemn them for making a scapegoat of the Foreign Secretary.<sup>113</sup> Chamberlain, though undoubtedly correct, was struggling against the tide. As the day wore on, the pressure mounted.

The precise turning-point of the Hoare-Laval crisis occurred Tuesday evening at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Conservative Party - in effect a gathering of all the backbenchers. Hostility ran high.<sup>114</sup> Almost all those who spoke opposed and condemned the proposals and favoured instead a policy based on the League of Nations.<sup>115</sup> Sir Austen Chamberlain, 'the most respected Conservative back-bench member', was the key figure.<sup>116</sup> 'Aged, cadaverous, correct and polite,'<sup>117</sup> he expressed the general sentiment when he said that 'gentlemen do not behave in such a way.'<sup>118</sup> On his recommendation,

the Committee resolved not to decide how to vote until they had heard Hoare's speech on Thursday.<sup>119</sup> Instead of assuring the Government of their support, the Tory rank and file were threatening to defeat their own Ministers on a vote of censure.

The day ended with the crisis at its peak. The survival of the Government lay in doubt.

Wednesday 18 December

The second stage of the crisis continued Wednesday at a fevered pitch. As the Government struggled to save themselves from impending disaster, Stanley Baldwin, master politician, set to work.

Outside of Westminster, there were only two new developments of any note. From Washington, the Ambassador cabled that American co-operation with any future oil embargo now appeared highly unlikely, and he expected that the policy of limiting exports would be allowed to lapse.<sup>120</sup> From Paris came full descriptions of the previous day's debate in the Chamber. It reflected the unsettled and divided state of French opinion. While the left bitterly attacked the suggested terms, the right defended them; and Laval turned the issue into a matter of confidence, surviving by a margin of only fifty-two, his lowest majority of the session. Fear of provoking a crisis and the reluctance of all the possible successors to Laval to replace him at this rather critical moment influenced the result and saved him from probable defeat. In the country, the division of opinion continued, and even those who sympathized with Laval's contention that an oil embargo meant war failed to see why this belief should have led him to the presentation of such proposals. Those who opposed him were asking whether a success for Mussolini would be a dress rehearsal for a far more effective performance by Hitler.<sup>121</sup>

At eleven o'clock in the morning, the Cabinet held their sixth and final session of the crisis.<sup>122</sup> Ironically, only Hoare and Eden, the two Ministers at the Foreign Office were absent. After some preliminary



matters, Halifax suggested that, though the Cabinet could not draft any resolutions, it might prove useful to resume the previous day's discussion on how to approach the upcoming Parliamentary debate.

What followed constituted one of the most unusual and dramatic Cabinet meetings of modern times. Hankey considered the proceedings so important that he identified each speaker separately and so sensitive that he wrote the most critical passages in longhand rather than typing them. He went so far as to make no copies of the minutes and to place the original under seal with the Cabinet archives, where it remained unopened until 1946. Hankey adopted all these precautions because Ministers took the extraordinary step of doing what Neville Chamberlain had told Duff Cooper they must not do: they turned on one of their own.

The discussion began, however, on a rather different and much more innocuous note. Baldwin opened the proceedings with an expression of support for the Foreign Secretary. He probably felt 'on trial' and must be allowed to make his speech in his own way. The Prime Minister added only that Hoare should and undoubtedly would raise the all-important issue of what other nations would do in the event of war and of how far Laval was prepared to go in the event of a sudden Italian attack.

Neville Chamberlain agreed that the Foreign Secretary most likely felt on trial, 'though, of course, the Cabinet were with him'. He still thought that his actions had been absolutely correct and intended to defend himself in the House of Commons, but he was now prepared to admit that in view of public opinion the Government could no longer support his proposals. Chamberlain himself thought that he had been misled by his staff (in other words by Vansittart) and might easily in his exhausted physical condition have committed an error of judgement. The Chancellor of the Exchequer then added, in agreement with the

Prime Minister, that Hoare would have to make clear the conditions which had weighed with him.

Chamberlain went on to present the Cabinet with an outline of the Foreign Secretary's proposed speech. While it would be improper, he said, to repeat it word for word, he would try to convey the general approach. (Tuesday evening he had received a draft from Hoare and had stayed up late making an abstract of it.<sup>123</sup>) As he explained it, the Foreign Secretary's argument would rest on four major points. He would begin by emphasizing the terrible danger of a European war. He had wished to avoid this happening and had gathered during the election that the British people shared this desire; but the proposed oil embargo had brought the situation into the danger zone, and, as the atmosphere in Paris had been full of the talk of war, he had felt that the risk was so great that he ought to consider the possibility of a peaceful settlement. Second, the Foreign Secretary would defend the terms on the grounds of their similarity [sic] to those of the Committee of Five, which the Emperor had accepted, and of their comparing favourably with Mussolini's demands of last June. Despite containing much that he disliked, they were the best that could be obtained with a reasonable chance of success. Hoare's third point would be that only two methods of achieving peace existed: negotiation or dictation. A negotiated peace would be impossible at the present time without giving something to the aggressor. If, as he was now prepared to admit, the proposals were dead, the only alternative was to turn back to sanctions. However, and this would be the fourth and final aspect of the Foreign Secretary's defence, sanctions were extremely dangerous. They might very well lead to hostilities, especially given their cumulative effect; and, though he did not fear the results of a conflict, it might pit Britain single-handedly against Italy. No other country, he would emphasize, had



prepared for war, and he would speak with the utmost frankness about Laval's position. Britain did not want to fight alone, and the actual situation was that no ship, no plane and no gun had been moved by any other nation.

The onslaught began immediately. Ministers refused to agree to Hoare's proposed speech. Most of them insisted he could not make it as Foreign Secretary; many of them objected to his making it at all, even from the backbenches.

The initial reaction came from two junior Ministers. Kingsley Wood felt very apprehensive of a defence on the suggested lines. Oliver Stanley feared that it would have a devastating effect in Parliament because, as the press had so ably rubbed in, arguments which might suffice for not imposing new sanctions hardly justified such an unsatisfactory peace. The criticism would be made that at the election the public had not been informed of the true position, and it would be recalled that only two days before he went to Paris Hoare had reaffirmed that a settlement must be acceptable to both Ethiopia and Italy. Stanley thought that the Foreign Secretary's approach endangered the future of the Government. In reply to a question from Baldwin as to what arguments he would use, he responded that while he was willing to agree to the early parts of the speech explaining the difficulties of the situation he felt that with respect to French unpreparedness all that could be done was to mention Laval's expressions of good will. Hoare could not say that ships and planes were not ready.

Swinton continued the criticism. He, too, agreed with the first part of the speech and, unlike Stanley, felt that French unreadiness to implement Laval's undertakings ought not to be concealed, but his assent hinged on the understanding that Hoare spoke only on his own behalf. The Government would never in advance have approved negotiations



on these lines, nor could they ever agree with the satisfaction expressed for the terms in the Paris communiqué. They must admit that the proposals were dead.

J.H. Thomas then carried Swinton's argument to its logical conclusion. After that speech, the Foreign Secretary would be discredited at Geneva and mistrusted everywhere in Europe, and his policies would always be suspect. Thomas could consent to the first part of the speech as background; but if, as suggested, Hoare made the latter part about other nations' unpreparedness on his own behalf, then he should resign and free the Government of responsibility. In that way, if it was clear that Hoare was making only a personal defence, the Government could successfully ride out the storm.

The Cabinet found themselves divided over the very important issue of international support for Britain. Duff Cooper and the Marquess of Zetland challenged the assertion that Britain would have to stand alone; both thought other countries would co-operate, and the former even said that the French army was better prepared than the British. On the other hand, Baldwin, Swinton, and Stanley doubted that France would provide support. The point, stated the Air Secretary, was not a matter of preparedness but rather of willingness.

The reality of the situation, however, was largely irrelevant. What counted was what the Foreign Secretary could say during the debate. Only Swinton, and initially Baldwin and Chamberlain in what they said before the latter's outline of Hoare's defence, thought that British fears about being caught alone ought to be expressed. Stanley, Thomas, Elliot, Ramsay MacDonald, Kingsley Wood, Hailsham, and certainly Duff Cooper and Zetland disagreed. 'It might,' said Walter Elliot, 'be a speech for a Member of Parliament to remember, but it would have a shattering effect in Europe.' The Cabinet must consider, he went on,

whether Hoare ought to resign. Ramsay MacDonald agreed that this aspect of Hoare's argument would make Britain's position impossible at Geneva and with the United States. Moreover, Hailsham pointed out, it would be a hopeless line to follow in Parliament, for 'the one thing to nail the lid on the coffin would be to say that we were not going on with sanctions on the ground that other nations had made no preparations'; and Kingsley Wood added that no one had yet said publically that other countries were not prepared to play their parts. Though their reasons differed, a very significant proportion of Ministers refused to assent to Hoare's stating that Britain's allies would leave her to fight Italy by herself.

In fact, most of the Cabinet were no longer willing to stand by the Foreign Secretary at all. Other than Baldwin and Chamberlain, only Zetland spoke in his defence. He recalled that they had initially agreed to the proposals because otherwise they would have had to repudiate Sir Samuel Hoare and that consequently they had accepted a responsibility of which they could not now rid themselves even if certain Ministers did not like it. Zetland added that he too had no objection to the first part of the argument and that Hoare could make a very plausible case for his actions by saying that the proposals had only been put to the League as a possible basis for discussion and nothing more. However, even the India Secretary refused to accept the latter part of the speech: not only did he think that Mussolini was bluffing, but he also believed that in the unlikely event that war did break out aid for Britain would certainly be forthcoming.

Even this qualified support for the Foreign Secretary was an exception. Lord Eustace Percy continued the attack. He felt that the political situation was 'tragic', and he insisted that the Government must avoid any hint of fearing Italy and any justification of the



suggested terms. If Hoare wanted to proceed with his proposed speech, he should resign. Ormsby-Gore agreed with this conclusion. He thought that the main criticism in the House would come on the method of the Plan's presentation to Ethiopia and that the only chance of getting away successfully required the admission of a mistake. Recalling his election pledge that he was prepared to resist the triumph of force, he also stated that the Foreign Secretary must resign.

Sir John Simon joined the rising chorus of opposition. The line put forward by the Marquess of Zetland - that the proposals only constituted a tentative suggestion - would not stand the test of a debate in the House, because the telegram instructing Barton to urge Haile Selassie to take a favourable attitude contradicted this defence. (Chamberlain here interpolated that he had not had the slightest idea that this telegram would be made public in the White Paper.) Moreover, continued Simon, he disagreed with Hoare's unrepentant belief that the proposals were correct, and he could not defend them either in the House or elsewhere. What made matters worse was the argument that in the atmosphere of war prevailing in Paris the Foreign Secretary had decided that a negotiated peace provided the only alternative; the House believed that no connection existed between going slowly on sanctions and pressing the terms upon the Emperor. Hoare had not acted consistently with his speech to the Assembly in September when he had pledged British support for the collective maintenance of the Covenant. Simon refused to acquiesce in the Cabinet's calling the proposals acceptable and thought, in fact, that Labour's motion of censure very nearly expressed what Ministers felt.

Halifax pushed the attack home. He wished to base the Government's defence on a plain statement of what had happened: the difficulties facing the Cabinet in view of the Foreign Secretary's absence and ill



health. But they had to admit their mistake, and Hoare must resign. At stake lay the whole moral position of the Government before the world; and Halifax added what no one had yet said: 'If the Prime Minister were to lose his personal position, one of our national anchors would have dragged'.

Baldwin himself, after his initial defence of Hoare, had little to add. He noted only that he had yet to make up his mind and that he had never known a worse situation in the House. The Government's majority might fall to one hundred.

With the discussion almost over, Chamberlain said that after the meeting he intended to return to the Foreign Secretary as it was only fair to give him some account of the proceedings. Hoare, he believed, would undoubtedly give careful consideration to the views expressed. The Chancellor had been defending his friend all through the above attacks, and he continued to do so. Though the Foreign Secretary was bound to present his own reasons for his actions, he (Hoare) did not think that, as the proposals were admittedly dead, he was committing the Government.

Sir John Simon refused to let Chamberlain get away with this. If 'Hoare as Foreign Secretary stated that he had not changed his mind in considering the proposals right, the Government were all exposed to a challenge'.

On this note, the Prime Minister closed the discussion.

As Halifax had said at the beginning, the Cabinet could draft no resolutions. Little doubt existed, however, as to the sense of the meeting. Of twenty Ministers present, fifteen participated in the discussion, and twelve clearly opposed Hoare's speech. His refusal to recant ensured that, if he stayed, the Government would be distrusted throughout the world and defeated - or at least suffer a crushing

diminution of their majority - in the House of Commons. Even Zetland, who thought that, in view of the Cabinet's earlier decision to support the Foreign Secretary, they could not now renege on their responsibility, disagreed with much of Hoare's argument. Only Neville Chamberlain stood fully by his friend, refusing to make a scapegoat of him. Though nine days ago he had led the opposition to accepting the Plan, he at least of the Cabinet was willing to honour his commitment. Throughout the discussion, he had been attempting to defend the Foreign Secretary and to interpret his speech as favourably as possible, pointing out, for example, that his conclusion was not that war must be avoided at the cost of a negotiated peace but rather that 'the risks of war were so great that a vigorous effort must be made to avert it'. Chamberlain also said - astonishingly enough - that he had gathered from a telephone message that Hoare might actually accept the Labour motion of censure (?!). The Chancellor even wrote a note to Halifax asking whether the Foreign Secretary might not say that he had offered his resignation but was leaving it to be accepted or rejected according to the result of the debate.<sup>124</sup> This suggestion, of course, was unacceptable; and, as Chamberlain entered in his diary: 'Generally it was felt that we must own up to a mistake and Halifax carried most weight when he said that, unless Sam went, the whole moral force of the Government would be gone'.<sup>125</sup> The only other Minister who said anything in favour of the Foreign Secretary was Stanley Baldwin in his opening remarks; but during the discussion, he added little except that he thought the situation extremely serious. By the end of the meeting, the Prime Minister realized that he could no longer support an unrepentant Foreign Secretary. Something had to give: the tone of the meeting had indicated to Baldwin that the Cabinet would not allow him to brazen it out. This



overwhelming opposition meant that Hoare must either resign or make a humiliating admission that he had grievously erred.

In effect, the Cabinet had made the fifth crucial decision of the Hoare-Laval crisis. They sacrificed the Foreign Secretary to ensure their own survival.

After the meeting, Neville Chamberlain went to acquaint Hoare with the Cabinet's views. In the latter's words:

He had been asked to tell me that my proposed statement did not go far enough, and that it was necessary for me to say that the plan was bad, that I had been mistaken in accepting it, and that in view of the general opposition I withdrew my support of it. I told him at once that I was not prepared to make any such recantation. I was convinced that nothing short of the proposals would save Abyssinia and prevent Mussolini from joining the Hitler front. This being so, resignation, not recantation, was the only course open to me. Chamberlain took my message back to Downing Street.<sup>126</sup>

The Foreign Secretary's account of this conversation is somewhat less than complete. After Chamberlain had left, Lord Beaverbrook came to visit, and Hoare told him that a compromise had been reached. He would resign, but in his speech to the House he would be very careful not to jeopardize the position of Baldwin or the Government in any way. In return, the Prime Minister had promised that he would be brought back into the Cabinet at the earliest possible moment.<sup>127</sup>

Some time later, Baldwin came by in person. According to the Foreign Secretary:

he found me determined to defend the plan, and in consequence to resign. He himself never suggested resignation to me. In fact, he would much have preferred that I should have fallen in with the Cabinet's wish for a recantation and have remained in the Government. My decision was, however, final.<sup>128</sup>



Again Sir Samuel is too modest. Undoubtedly, Baldwin would have preferred recantation to resignation, for a contrite Foreign Secretary would have gotten the Government off the hook more easily, but Hoare neglects to add that the Prime Minister gave him a letter either at this meeting or else sometime during the following three or four days (the Foreign Secretary showed this letter to Beaverbrook on Sunday 22 December 1935) in which he confirmed his promise to give Hoare another Portfolio in due course provided the latter resigned without compromising the Government.<sup>129</sup>

Apparently Baldwin decided to excise two dangers in one shot. On the one hand, he did not want Hoare's resignation speech either to imperil his own position or to bring down the Government. Therefore, he bought the Foreign Secretary's loyalty. At the same time, Baldwin used Neville Chamberlain, one of Hoare's closest friends, as intermediary and thereby safeguarded himself from any threat to his position from the man who was heir apparent and his greatest rival for the leadership of the Conservative Party. Stanley Baldwin was demonstrating why men like Beaverbrook and Churchill regarded him as the shrewdest political manipulator of the day.

Whatever conditions adhered to the Foreign Secretary's resignation, the morning's Cabinet had made it virtually inevitable, and it was announced officially at half past nine in the evening.

It came as no surprise to the House of Commons. Members began to speculate as to who would succeed him. Eden and Halifax were mentioned.<sup>130</sup> So was Sir Austen Chamberlain.<sup>131</sup> He was a former Foreign Secretary, the elder statesman in the Conservative Party, a figure of respect, and a man of rectitude and honour whose reputation remained unsullied by the Hoare-Laval crisis. His opposition to the Plan and his undoubted ability to lead the backbenchers in rebellion posed the greatest danger to the

Government. In his hands lay their fate. Somewhat ironically, it was 1922 all over again, only in reverse. Then, at the Carlton Club meeting, Baldwin had destroyed the Coalition and deprived Austen Chamberlain of office. On this Wednesday in 1935, the tables were turned, and Sir Austen had the power to oust the Prime Minister and exile him into the political wilderness.

Baldwin decided to take out insurance. Having bought off Hoare and Neville Chamberlain, he now moved to ensure the support of the latter's much more dangerous half-brother. He sent for him and said:

Austen, when Sam has gone, I shall want to talk to you about the Foreign Office.

To Chamberlain, the meaning of this statement was perfectly clear.

Baldwin had just promised to return him to his beloved Foreign Office.<sup>132</sup>

Thursday 19 December

By Thursday, eleven days after the release of the fatal Paris communiqué and ten days after the initial Cabinet decision to accept the peace proposals, the dénouement of the crisis had arrived. The play neared its end. With the Hoare-Laval Plan a dead letter, the oil embargo indefinitely postponed, and Sir Samuel Hoare out of office, only one scene remained. It was to be acted out in the afternoon and evening in the House of Commons. Despite the Government's great majority of almost 250, their survival lay in peril.

In the morning, news arrived from Paris of a resignation almost rivalling that of Sir Samuel Hoare. At a stormy meeting on Wednesday night of the executive committee of the Radical Party, Herriot had come under severe criticism: surely, one of the most important Ministers in the government ought to have been able to do more about the proposals than ineffectually protest after the event. In the face of accusations of 'sheer trickery', he had resigned the Presidency of the Party. In general, opinion in the French capital still divided on predictable lines, and Thursday's debate in London aroused a great deal of interest. Many quarters felt intense indignation over the British fear, apparently encouraged by Laval, that France would not come to Britain's aid in the event of a mad dog act by Italy.<sup>133</sup>

From Geneva came reports of Wednesday's meeting of the Council. Though it had postponed for a day the final decision, the general impression was that the Hoare-Laval Plan was dead. It was expected that the Eighteen would meet on Thursday (today) to discuss further action



on sanctions; but doubts existed as to the attitude of the United States towards the oil embargo, and it was by no means certain that this measure would even be raised let alone applied. (In fact, the Council met Thursday evening and passed a resolution which buried the proposals and ended any Anglo-French mandate for finding a solution to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. A meeting of the Eighteen followed and resulted in a decision to continue the application of existing sanctions. Nothing was said or done about the oil embargo.<sup>134</sup> Both it and the Plan thus died. So too, though this was perhaps not quite so obvious, did the League of Nations.)

No official response had yet come from either of the two combatants. Haile Selassie was hoping that the League would reject the proposals for him, and Mussolini was waiting for the results of the debate in the House of Commons.<sup>135</sup> The Italian leader wanted, if possible to accept the proffered terms. From London, Grandi had urged this course as it would place Britain and France in a difficult position, and the Italian foreign ministry was also pushing for agreement. On Wednesday, the pressure from the Palazzo Chigi had mounted, and two high-ranking officials had drawn up a communiqué stating that the Fascist Grand Council greatly appreciated the amicable spirit of the Anglo-French approach and had decided to consider the proposals as a possible basis for negotiation.<sup>136</sup> A peaceful solution had been imminent, and Mussolini had phoned Grandi and instructed him to go at once to Downing Street and inform Baldwin that Italy agreed to the terms. The Ambassador had first asked for an hour to make certain that there was no truth to the rumour that Hoare had just resigned.<sup>137</sup> When this latest development had been confirmed, Mussolini had changed his mind about accepting the suggested settlement.<sup>138</sup> In any case, neither his nor Haile Selassie's

attitudes mattered any longer - now that the Foreign Secretary had gone and the Government had killed his proposals.

In London, on Thursday morning, the newspapers applauded the demise of the Plan and the resignation of its draftsman. Despite a good deal of sympathy for Hoare, they agreed that in leaving office he had followed the proper course. In the day's debate, said The Times, the Government must not attempt to justify the Paris proposals but rather, after explaining their actions and reassuring a deeply disquieted British public, must admit their mistake and pledge a return to a policy of steady and collective resistance to aggression.

At a quarter to three in the afternoon, the House of Commons convened for the final, tension-filled scene of the drama. The floor was so crowded that members crammed even the side galleries from where they could barely see or hear. Excited onlookers, including the American, French, Italian, and German Ambassadors, jammed the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery, and the Soviet Ambassador found himself seated next to the Prince of Wales.<sup>139</sup>

In a House packed as it had not been for years,<sup>140</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare rose from a backbench to give his personal explanation. He made substantially the same speech that Neville Chamberlain had outlined to the Cabinet yesterday morning. He pointed out the danger of a general European war, the importance of preserving solid Anglo-French relations, and the strong possibility of the oil embargo's resulting in hostilities between Italy and Britain. In these circumstances, he had gone to Paris and agreed with Laval on a set of peace proposals. Hoare then defended the actual terms on the grounds that they were



based on the principles of the Committee of Five, which Haile Selassie had accepted, and that they were not intended to be imposed on the belligerents but rather to get them to negotiate. Finally, he stressed that the continuation of pressure on Italy increased the likelihood of war and therefore that it was essential for Britain to have actual proof by action of other nations' willingness to assume their responsibilities. He emphasized that he did not fear a British defeat, but that unless there was collective action either the League would break up or there would be a most unsatisfactory peace. 'Not a ship, not a machine, not a man has been moved by any other member state.'

As for himself, while he still believed that he had been correct and could not honestly recant, nevertheless it was essential for the Foreign Secretary to have the support of the country behind him. Therefore, he had to resign. He only wanted to add that he hoped his successor had better luck.

Hoare had kept his part of the bargain with Stanley Baldwin. He had accepted full, personal responsibility for the proposals and not implicated the Government. During his speech, in response to an interjection from some members, he had actually made a parenthetical comment in order to ensure that this point was clear. He had also stated that 'without any prompting, without any suggestion from anyone, I asked the Prime Minister to accept my resignation'. He had resigned, he said, 'for this reason alone': because he had not got the confidence and the support of the British public behind him and thus would 'not carry weight and influence in the councils of the world'. While the former Foreign Secretary had ably defended himself, he had not embarrassed the Government.



The reaction from M.P.s to Hoare's speech was that he had made the effort of his life.<sup>141</sup> He had put his case with 'a dignity, lucidity and firmness that compelled admiration all round'.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, though the House heard him courteously and received his speech warmly, a convincing argument proved difficult,<sup>143</sup> and the quality of his defence failed to alter the general belief that his usually cool judgement had for once been sadly at fault.<sup>144</sup>

After Sir Samuel had finished his personal explanation, the Leader of the Opposition rose to propose the Labour Party's motion of censure. He expressed his sympathy for the former Foreign Secretary and wished him a speedy recovery, but he added that if Hoare had been correct in resigning - and indeed he had - then the Government as a whole should go: as they had taken collective responsibility, Hoare should not be turned into a scapegoat. The proposals themselves, continued Attlee, were grossly unfair and had outraged opinion everywhere. Not only were they incompatible with Hoare's speech to the Assembly in September, but they were a violation of the Covenant and would destroy the League. 'They can be put into a nutshell: it is the surrender to an aggressor of half an empire in exchange for a corridor for camels.' As for the alleged failure of any country to support Britain, Attlee quoted Hoare's own words to the House on 22 October:

The French answer is the answer we felt sure it would be.... In the event of an isolated attack, inconceivable though such madness might be, we and they and the rest of the League stand together and resist it with our full and united force.

The Leader of the Opposition wanted to know why the situation had apparently changed. He wanted to know whether the Prime Minister would unseal his lips and make such a case that not one man would go into the lobby against the Government. All told the situation was a betrayal of

Ethiopia, of the League, and of the people who had voted for the Prime Minister in the last election. The debate, said Attlee, raised two issues:

There is the question of the honour of this country, and there is the question of the honour of the Prime Minister. If, as is suggested in some quarters, the Prime Minister won an election on one policy and immediately after victory was prepared to carry out another, it has an extremely ugly look. (my emphasis)

Stanley Baldwin's reply to Attlee's attack was weak and ineffective.<sup>145</sup> He seemed embarrassed, spoke very lamely,<sup>146</sup> and generally failed to answer the charges levelled against the Government. After deeply regretting the loss of an old and wise colleague, he attempted to deal not with the details but with the major points. He sketched out the position in which the Cabinet had found themselves on Monday morning when they had received the proposals. In the absence of liaison on Sunday, they had come as a complete surprise. Ministers had known of the leak in Paris; they had known that a storm of questions would follow and that the matter would be raised in the House. They had had to make a quick decision. While none of the Cabinet had liked the terms, they had decided that they had to support a colleague not present to defend himself. That decision, Baldwin now admitted, had been a mistake, perhaps a weakness, certainly an error of judgement - one for which he was chiefly to blame. The lesson to be learned was that liaison, even if it meant delay, was essential. The Cabinet must, beyond any doubt, bear full responsibility for the proposals, but 'never throughout the week had I or any of my colleagues any idea in our minds that we were not being true to every pledge we had given in the election'. However, he had not expected that deep swell of feeling which arose in the country on what he called the ground of



conscience and honour. When that happened, it became perfectly obvious that the proposals did not command the necessary support. They were now completely and utterly dead, and there could be no attempt to ressurect them. For the future, the Government stood where they had always stood (which was on the fence and hanging back - though Baldwin did not say that) and were prepared in every way to live up to their collective responsibility and to support the League of Nations; but, he emphasized, any action must indeed be collective: as the ultimate sanction behind the League was an immensely superior force, members would have to face up to this problem and be willing to do their share. The Prime Minister concluded his speech with a plea for confidence from all who would call themselves his supporters.

Baldwin had done little more than admit his mistake, bow to the storm, and ask for forgiveness. He had done what he was so good at and thrown himself upon the mercy of the House.<sup>147</sup> He had failed to deal adequately with Attlee's criticisms and had made no effort to unseal his lips. He did not 'explain why what he himself considered an unanswerable case was now indefensible'.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, after the debate, Sir Austen Chamberlain wrote:

Had I thought it compatible with the public interest I believe that after Stanley Baldwin's miserably inadequate speech and the initial blunder, I could have so reduced his majority as to force his resignation.<sup>149</sup>

In practice, however, Sir Austen did the very opposite. Speaking immediately after the Prime Minister, he made the most important speech of the day. After applauding the demise of the Plan and agreeing with Baldwin and Hoare that Britain should not have to stand alone against Italy, he said flatly that he would vote for the Government and against Labour's motion of censure. The Leader of the Opposition, he continued,



by challenging the personal honour of the Prime Minister had ensured that the Government's supporters would stand by them:

Whatever opinion we may hold about what is past, whatever differences of opinion there may be among us as to what ought to be done now, that is a challenge which every Member of the National party will resent and resist.

The debate went on, but Chamberlain's intervention proved decisive. After more than seven hours, the House divided, and the Government survived by a very healthy majority of close to 230.<sup>150</sup> Attlee had made the great blunder of the day.<sup>151</sup> His demand for Baldwin's resignation was undoubtedly justified, but he erred tactically in attacking the Prime Minister's personal honour.<sup>152</sup> Sir Austen Chamberlain made use of this mistake to ensure the survival of the Government and, so he felt, his own return to the Foreign Office.<sup>153</sup>

On that note, the Hoare-Laval crisis ended, but the shattered pieces of British foreign policy and the Government's own prestige remained to be put back together.

## Notes to Chapter Eight

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Unless otherwise noted, all references to speeches in the House of Commons come directly from Hansard (Parliamentary Debates. Official Report. Fifth Series. Volume 307. 26 November - 20 December 1935) and all descriptions of and quotations from Cabinet Meetings are from the Cabinet Minutes. Unfortunately, in this record of Cabinet discussions, individual speakers are not always identified.

1. The description of Sunday's events is based, unless otherwise noted, on Anthony Eden, Facing the Dictators, pp. 299-300.
2. Tom Jones, A Diary with Letters, pp. 158-159. A conversation with Baldwin on 7 January 1936.
3. Eden, p. 299. Keith Feiling, Neville Chamberlain, p. 274: a letter from Chamberlain to his sister of 15 December 1935. The original plan had been for Hoare to fly to Paris, arriving in time for lunch, and then, after talks with Laval, to take the night train to Switzerland; but fog in London meant that Hoare took the boat train and did not get to Paris until 4 p.m. (J.A. Cross, Sir Samuel Hoare, p. 243). Given, however, the amount of time necessary on Sunday to finish the discussions and draft the agreement - the meeting did not end until 6:30 p.m. (Arnold Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs 1935, volume ii, p. 300) - it is unlikely that the initial delay in London made much difference.
4. Speech to the House of Commons on Thursday 19 December 1935.
5. Maurice Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain, p. 121. The following description of Eden's behaviour before the Cabinet meeting later in the day is taken from Eden, pp. 300-304.
6. Eden records (p. 301) that Peterson had expected this adverse reaction and had not thought that he would like the terms. Peterson felt that he could have done better himself, and Eden had no doubt that this was true.
7. British archives contain no record of these discussions.
8. The Times, 10 December 1935.
9. Cabinet meeting 52(35). Monday 9 December 1935.
10. Cabinet Paper 233(35), 9 December 1935. 'Record of a meeting held at the Quai d'Orsay on 7 December 1935, at 5:30 p.m.'
11. Cabinet Paper 235(35), 9 December 1935. Text of the Hoare-Laval Plan and Sir Samuel Hoare's letter to the Cabinet, written on Sunday 8 December 1935 after the talks ended, recommending the proposals to the Cabinet.
12. Cabinet Paper 236(35), 9 December 1935. 'Oil Supplies for Italy', from W. Runciman, President of the Board of Trade.



13. Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin, p. 886.
14. Tom Jones, pp. 158-159, a conversation with Baldwin on 7 January 1936; Eden, p. 302; and the Cabinet Minutes.
15. In Paris, a reasonably accurate version of the Hoare-Laval Plan appeared in two morning papers. Genevieve Tabouis printed it in L'Oeuvre and 'Pertinax' in L'Echo de Paris. Both journalists were hostile to Laval, to fascism, and to Germany, and they published the details of the Plan in order to ruin it (Genevieve Tabouis, They Called Me Cassandra, pp. 267-270).

The two interesting and unanswered questions concern the source and the intention of the leak. Speculation has varied from the Foreign Office to the Quai d'Orsay, and from wrecking the proposals to preparing public opinion for them. Some conjecture has picked Paris as the locale. In his memoirs, Hoare records (Lord Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 182) that he briefed a number of journalists after the talks had ended. However, he warned the British press not to breathe a hint, and Laval did the same with the French (Manchester Guardian, 10 December 1935). The French Premier believed that the source was Sir Charles Mendl, the press attaché at the British Embassy in Paris. Laval thought that Mendl worked for the British secret service and had leaked the Plan in order to ruin it (Geoffrey Warner, Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France, p. 122). On the other hand, general opinion in Britain, as indicated by Eden's remark to the Cabinet, felt that the French had revealed the terms of the settlement. Certainly, the French papers printed them first, and Sunday night the Paris correspondent of the New York Times cabled them to his paper (Gaetano Salvemini, Prelude to World War II, p. 395). However, other evidence suggests that the leak came from London. On Sunday night, 'Augur' telegraphed a summary to the New York Times (ibid.). Moreover, both 'Pertinax' and Tabouis passed Sunday in London (The Times, 17 December 1935). The latter records that she was hiding with friends to avoid pressure not to publish. She mentions no specific source but does note speaking to Vansittart on 4 December: 'I got the impression from him that in London the attitude had become: "Well, it's too bad for Ethiopia, but it can't be helped".' (Tabouis, pp. 267-270). And, as pointed out above (page 192), Vansittart stated before going to Paris that public opinion would have to be prepared for a negotiated settlement.

Despite all this circumstantial evidence, the existence of any leak at all is very doubtful. The general nature of any likely terms was well known. On Friday 6 December, The Times outlined the British position at the Paris talks, and the Manchester Guardian printed both the British and French preliminary proposals. Then, on Sunday evening after the discussions ended, a communiqué was issued which stated that formulas for a settlement had been reached. Very likely, several competent journalists just put two and two together and arrived at the obvious answer. Moreover, one is tempted to ask how those correspondents in London could have found out the exact terms when these did not arrive there, via Peterson, until Monday morning. In fact, neither they nor any journalists in Paris did find out the exact terms. The press reports were substantially



correct approximations, but they were not accurate in every detail. Moreover, they said nothing about the procedures arranged for handling the proposals. In my opinion, there actually was no leak.

16. Eden, pp. 302-304.
17. Eden's fears are given credence by Geoffrey Warner's comment (p. 123): 'Eden correctly divined Laval's intention of using the Duce's acceptance and the Emperor's probable subsequent refusal as an excuse for not imposing sanctions, at least in respect of oil'.
18. Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell had just become Viscount Monsell, and Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, Air Secretary, had just become Viscount Swinton.
19. There is no mention in the Cabinet Minutes of the consequences of an Italian rejection of the proposals. Ministers presumably accepted Hoare's (and Laval's) assumption that Italy would agree to the terms.
20. The Times, 10 December 1935.
21. Ibid.
22. This list is a summary of the formal conclusions of the Cabinet.
23. On 15 December 1935, Neville Chamberlain wrote to his sister that the leak 'made it impossible for us to amend the proposals, or even to defer accepting them, without throwing over our Foreign Secretary' (Feiling, p. 274). Similarly, on 26 December 1935, Halifax wrote to Chamberlain saying that 'the initial mistake was Sam's, in publishing his (and therefore, except at great price, our) assent in the Paris communiqué' (Feiling, p. 275).
24. Tom Jones, pp. 158-159, a conversation with Baldwin on 7 January 1936. Swinton (Sixty Years of Power, pp. 74-75) conjectures that Baldwin may well have drawn a parallel between Hoare's present public commitment and his own predicament in 1923 with Bonar Law and the settlement of Britain's war debt to the United States.
25. Toynbee, p. 302.
26. Ibid.
27. Letter to Neville Chamberlain of 26 December 1935 (Feiling, p. 275).
28. Eden, p. 303.
29. Tom Jones (pp. 158-159) quotes Baldwin as telling him on 7 January 1936 that 'If we disowned Sam the French would be angry and would say we had let them down, so we backed him. We did not like it at all, but the alternative seemed to us to be worse'.
30. Letter of 15 December 1935 (Feiling, p. 275).

31. This account comes from the record of Tuesday's Cabinet meeting (CAB 53(35)) - the same source, judging by the similarities of style and language, as used by Eden in his memoirs.
32. Eden, pp. 305-306.
33. A copy of this telegram was included as an appendix to the Cabinet Minutes of Tuesday 10 December 1935. The registry number of this telegram is J 9083/1/1. Further copies of it may be found in the Public Record Office in two files: F.O. 401/35 and F.O. 371/19168. (All Foreign Office telegrams referred to below will be identified by the Foreign Office registry number followed by the PRO file number.)
34. Later on, during Tuesday's Cabinet meeting, Eden stated in reply to a question that Laval had good reasons for believing Haile Selassie would reject the terms. In fact, in a gloss on his earlier telegram, Vansittart reported (J 9108/1/1, F.O. 401/35) that at their 2 a.m. meeting Laval had said that he knew from a secret source (which Vansittart, though informed of its identity, did not mention) that Ethiopia would turn down the proposals in the hope of bringing about the oil embargo. Laval's belief was almost certainly correct - this had been one of the main motivations behind the procedural details of the Hoare-Laval Plan.
35. Cabinet meeting 53(35), 10 December 1935.
36. Attached to the Cabinet Minutes. Also J 9083/1/1, F.O. 401/35.
37. The proposals appeared in other newspapers as well, but during the crisis it was always The Times which was referred to in Parliament as the paper of record. It was undoubtedly the one Ministers were most likely to read. Consequently, I have used it as my primary press reference.
38. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 887.
39. Tom Jones, pp. 158-159, a conversation with Baldwin on 7 January 1936.
40. Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change, p. 444. Macmillan's source is A.W. Baldwin, My Father: The True Story, p. 291. J.C.C. Davidson (Memoirs of a Conservative, p. 409) also believed this to be the reason for Baldwin's remark.
41. In addition to Eden and Baldwin, eight members spoke during the debate: Attlee and seven other Labour M.P.s - all highly critical. The final speaker for the Opposition stated that they were taking the unusual course of voting against the Throne Speech 'as the only means open to us of entering our emphatic protest against the terrible crime which seems likely to be committed'. Of course, the Government's great majority prevailed. Starting on Wednesday, Parliament got down to the regular business of the new session.
42. Telegrams J 9107/1/1, F.O. 401/35 and J 9145/1/1, F.O. 371/19168.
43. J 9127/1/1, F.O. 401/35.



44. J 9130/1/1, F.O. 371/19168.
45. J 9135/1/1, F.O. 371/19168.
46. Templewood, pp. 183-184.
47. Events outside London are described not as they happened but as they were known in London.
48. J 9137/1/1, F.O. 371/19168.
49. The Times, 11 December 1935.
50. So he told the Cabinet later in the day.
51. The Times, 11 December 1935.
52. Cabinet Meeting 54(35), 11 December 1935.
53. The Cabinet met an hour earlier than usual so that Eden could attend and still catch the train from Victoria. As Ministers were assembling, Eden circulated last night's telegram from Vansittart (J 9135/1/1, F.O. 371/19168 - see above pp. 222-223) saying that Laval had finally accepted the British position. During the meeting, Eden announced that, also the previous night, the proposals had been cabled to Rome and Addis Ababa. Eden said nothing about the message he had sent to Barton concerning the railway.
54. J.H. Thomas made this remark to Harold Nicolson (Diaries and Letters 1930-1939, p. 224. Diary entry for 11 December 1935).
55. During Wednesday's Cabinet meeting, it was pointed out that Hoare, Eden, and Vansittart would all be out of the country for at least the following twenty-four hours. Baldwin then stated 'that he himself had taken responsibility for the Foreign Office during the absence of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs'.
56. The Times, 12 December 1935.
57. Nicolson, p. 224. Diary entry for 11 December 1935.
58. J.E. Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times, p. 326. Diary entry for 12 December 1935.
59. The Times, 14 December 1935.
60. Ibid.
61. Telegram from the British Ambassador, J 9324/1/1, F.O. 371/19169.
62. Telegrams J 9252/1/1 (Denmark), J 9253/1/1 (Norway), J 9333/1/1 (Finland), F.O. 371/19169; J 9355/1/1 (Sweden), F.O. 371/19170; J 9305/1/1 (Holland), F.O. 371/19169; J 9428/1/1 (South Africa), F.O. 371/19170; and J 9365/1/1 and J 9370/1/1 (Yugoslavia), F.O. 371/19170.



63. Telegram from the British Ambassador, J 9369/1/1, F.O. 371/19170.
64. J 9294/1/1, F.O. 371/19169.
65. Telegrams from Sir George Clerk, J 9251/1/1 and J 9323/1/1, F.O. 371/19169.
66. The Times, 13 December 1935.
67. Telegram from Sir George Clerk, J 9323/1/1, F.O. 371/19169.
68. The Times, 13 December 1935.
69. Telegrams from Eden: J 9250/1/1, J 9271/1/1, and J 9319/1/1, F.O. 371/19169; J 9325/1/1, F.O. 401/35; and J 9364/1/1 and J 9371/1/1, F.O. 371/19170.
70. For what happened at Geneva, see Eden (pp. 306-308), Eden's telegrams, The Times, and the Manchester Guardian.
- 70a. By 12 December, ten governments had informed the Secretary General that they were willing to embargo oil: Argentina, British India, Czechoslovakia, Finland, New Zealand, Thailand, Iraq, the Netherlands, Romania, and the USSR. The last four countries produced 18.7% of the world's oil and provided 74.3% of Italian imports. The USA produced 59.1%. She provided 6.3% of Italy's imports during the first nine months of 1935 and 17.8% during the last quarter (Toynbee, p. 276).
71. Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office, p. 81.
72. Eden, p. 308.
73. Telegrams J 9222/1/1 and J 9340/1/1, F.O. 401/35.
74. The Times, 12 December 1935.
75. The Times, 14 December 1935. On Wednesday, Cerutti indicated to Laval that the Italian reply would be favourable (The Times, 12 December 1935).
76. Telegram from Sir Sidney Barton, J 9318/1/1, F.O. 371/19169.
77. The Times, 12, 13, and 14 December 1935. Toynbee, pp. 308-309.
78. Macmillan, p. 439. Robert Boothby (I Fight to Live, p. 135) wrote: 'The public reaction to the Hoare-Laval proposals for the dismemberment of Abyssinia was spontaneous, widespread, and wholly creditable. It was one of disgust.'
79. The Times, 14 December 1935.
80. Ibid.
81. Manchester Guardian, 16 December 1935

82. Wrench, p. 326. Diary entry for 12 December 1935.
83. A letter to Mr. Orme Sargent from Mr. Nigel Law in the City. To be found in the PRO: J 9250/1/1, F.O. 371/19169
84. The official text of the Hoare-Laval Plan was published in The Times on Saturday 14 December 1935. A British White Paper on 'Documents relating to the Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy' (Cmd. 5044) was released to Parliament and public on Saturday morning. It is reproduced as Appendix IV.
85. Nicolson, p. 226. Diary entry for 13 December 1935.
86. Eden, p. 308.
87. The Times, 16 December 1935.
88. Feiling, p. 274. Chamberlain continues: 'You take some comfort from the thought that, if I had been Premier, the discredit would have fallen on me instead of on S.B. That is true, if the same things had happened. But I affirm, with some confidence, that they would not have happened.'
89. Eden, p. 308.
90. The Times, 13, 14, and 16 December 1935.
91. During question time in the House of Commons on Thursday 12 December, Attlee asked Baldwin whether the following Thursday would be available for a debate on the Italo-Ethiopian issue. Baldwin refused to give a definite yes, but he indicated that such would probably be the case. By the morning of Saturday 14 December 1935, he had definitely agreed to that date for a debate on the Hoare-Laval Plan (The Times, 14 December 1935).
92. The Times, 13 December 1935.
93. Manchester Guardian, 16 December 1935.
94. Sir Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Sir Austen Chamberlain, volume ii, p. 404.
95. J 9438/1/1, F.O. 371/19170.
96. J 9435/1/1, F.O. 371/19170.
97. Another letter from Mr. Law to Mr. Sargent, J 9485/1/1, F.O. 371/19171.
98. The Times, 17 December 1935.
99. Eden did mention these points at the Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 17 December 1935.
100. The Times, 17 December 1935, and Hansard.
101. The Times, 17 December 1935.



102. Tom Jones, p. 161. A conversation with Lord Astor on 14 January 1936.
103. Although it was not a formal Cabinet meeting, Hankey was present and took notes. A brief outline may be found with the Cabinet Minutes. The main points, Hankey wrote, were discussed again on Tuesday and were included in detail in the records of that meeting.
104. Feiling, p. 275. Letter of 26 December 1935 from Halifax to Neville Chamberlain.
105. Templewood, pp. 184-185.
106. Cabinet Meeting 55(35), 17 December 1935.
107. The Times, 18 December 1935.
108. Eden, p. 309.
109. Templewood, p. 185.
110. Quoted from Middlemas and Barnes, p. 892.
111. Macmillan, p. 447.
112. Ibid. Feiling, p. 274. The Parliamentary Correspondent of The Times wrote (18 December 1935) that there was little doubt that in the present mood of the House of Commons the motion of censure would, in the absence of Parliamentary discipline, pass easily.
113. Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain, pp. 188-189.
114. Tom Jones, p. 161. A conversation with Lord Astor on 14 January 1936.
115. Henry Channon, 'Chips': the Diaries of Sir Henry Channon, p. 47. Diary entry for 17 December 1935.
116. Macmillan, p. 446.
117. Channon, p. 47. Diary entry for 17 December 1935.
118. Macmillan, p. 446.
119. Manchester Guardian, 18 December 1935.
120. J 9489/1/1, F.O. 371/19171.
121. The Times, 18 December 1935. See also the Manchester Guardian and the Daily Telegraph of the same date.
122. Cabinet Meeting 56(35), 18 December 1935.
123. Macleod, pp. 188-189.

124. Macleod, pp. 188-189.
125. Ibid.
126. Templewood, p. 185.
127. 'The Hoare Story'. This is an unfinished monograph, to be found in the Beaverbrook Library, begun in 1960 by Mr. R.C. Brooks, Lord Beaverbrook's secretary.
128. Templewood, p. 185.
129. R.C. Brooks, 'The Hoare Story'. Brooks is here following a 1953 account by Lord Beaverbrook. Hoare's biographer (Cross, pp. 260-261) says that the letter seems to have disappeared but that there does exist in the Baldwin papers a letter from Hoare to the Prime Minister, dated 22 December 1935, which might very well have been a reply. In it, Hoare wrote: 'Thank you very much for your letter'.
130. Daily Telegraph, 19 December 1935.
131. The Times, 19 December 1935.
132. Colvin, p. 83.
133. The Times, 19 December 1935.
134. The Times and the Manchester Guardian, 19 and 20 December 1935.
135. Baron Pompeo Aloisi, Journal (25 Juillet 1932 - 14 Juin 1936), pp. 330-331.
136. Raefele Guariglia, La Diplomatie Difficile, pp. 65-67.
137. Leo Amery, My Political Life, volume iii, The Unforgiving Years, p. 184. Grandi told him this story 'just afterwards'.
138. Guariglia, p. 67.
139. The Times, 20 December 1935.
140. Earl Winterton, Orders of the Day, p. 210. Diary entry for 19 December 1935.
141. Ibid. Hoare's speech must have been quite impressive, and his general reputation outstanding, for Winterton amazingly goes on to record in his diary (pp. 210-211) that 'I had a casual conversation with two "diehards" and one left-winger after the debate, all of whom said Sam would be Prime Minister before the end of this Parliament'.(?!)
142. Manchester Guardian, 20 December 1935.
143. The Times, 20 December 1935.
144. Daily Telegraph, 20 December 1935.



145. Manchester Guardian, 20 December 1935. Winterton, p. 210, diary entry for 19 December 1935.
146. Channon, p. 48. Diary entry for 19 December 1935.
147. Channon (ibid.) records: 'In no other country could the Prime Minister stand up in the Chamber and calmly say "I made a mistake and I am sorry". But Mr. Baldwin can do this better than anyone'.
148. Amery, p. 185.
149. Petrie, p. 406.
150. The House actually divided twice, first to defeat the Labour motion of censure, the second time to approve an amendment proposed by Earl Winterton - who claimed in his speech to be making it on his own initiative but with the foreknowledge of the Government. The amendment changed the original motion (see above page 245) to read:

That this House, holding that any terms for settling the Italo-Abyssinian dispute should be such as the League can accept, assures His Majesty's Government of its full support in pursuing the foreign policy outlined in the Government manifesto and endorsed by the country at the recent general election.

On the motion, the House divided: ayes, 165; nays, 397. On the amendment: ayes, 390; nays, 165.

According to The Times (20 December 1935), these were two of the largest divisions in recent years. The pairings and abstentions taken into consideration, only twenty-three members remained unaccounted for.

151. The Times, 20 December 1935.
152. Winterton, p. 210. Diary entry for 19 December 1935.
153. Chamberlain certainly believed that he could have brought down the Government. Instead, he ensured their survival. In return, he expected to be invited to become Foreign Secretary (Sir Walford Selby, Diplomatic Twilight, p. 54). Beaverbrook confirms this in a letter he wrote to Derby on 21 February 1936 (R.C. Brooks, 'The Hoare Story'): 'Winston told me - privately I think - before I came away that Baldwin had given Austen to understand when the Hoare issue arose that Austen would be the next Foreign Secretary. He allowed Austen to pilot the Government barque through stormy waters in the House in the belief that he was about to take office'.

PART III

ANALYSIS



## **Chapter Nine**

### **Testing the Propositions**

This thesis has been divided into three broad sections. The first established a theory of crisis decision-making and then derived from it a number of empirically testable propositions. The second presented the case study: a detailed description and explanation of the process of decision-making as conducted by the British Government during the initial twelve months of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. The third section, beginning here, uses the historical evidence of the case study to test the propositions and the theory.

#### A - Evaluating the Evidence

In order to test the propositions satisfactorily, the historical evidence must meet two requirements.

First, it must consist of both a crisis and a non-crisis situation. One of the propositions, for example, asserts that group cohesion will be much higher in crisis situations than in non-crisis ones. The evidence required to test this must be comparative; by itself, the degree of cohesion in a crisis tells one nothing. Only by comparing cohesion in crisis situations with that in non-crisis ones can the evidence properly test the proposition.



However, the fact that group cohesion was higher in a crisis situation than in a non-crisis one does not necessarily mean that a causal relationship exists between crisis and group cohesion. As noted in Chapter One, several factors can potentially influence the nature of the decision-making process. The three characteristics which distinguish crises from non-crises form only one of those factors. To continue with the previous example, an increase in group cohesion from a non-crisis to a crisis situation can result from differences in any of these factors and not just from differences in those three characteristics used to define crisis. Consequently, the second requirement necessary for testing the propositions is a sufficient degree of similarity between the two decision situations such that the exact factor which led to differences in the process of decision-making can be confidently identified.

The case study satisfies both of these requirements. In the first place, it provides the opportunity to compare decision-making processes in both crisis and non-crisis situations. In fact, the entire twelve month period covered by the historical evidence - from December of 1934 to December of 1935 - divides into three decision situations, of which only one was a crisis.

The first decision situation lasted from the Wal Wal incident of 5 December 1934 up to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October 1935. While great power interference in Ethiopia was not a new problem, the issue had been quiescent for some years until the Wal Wal incident rekindled old flames. This skirmish between a small Ethiopian force and an Italian native levy led to an immediate exchange of protests. An Ethiopian note of 9 December invoked the 1928 Treaty of Friendship between Italy and Ethiopia and asked for arbitration, a request which Italy rejected five days later on the grounds that Ethiopian

responsibility was perfectly obvious. Instead, Rome demanded apologies, reparations, and a salute by an Ethiopian delegation to the Italian flag at Wal Wal, in effect recognition of Italian sovereignty. In response, Addis Ababa appealed on 14 December to the League of Nations. For the British Government, the following ten months formed one coherent decision situation; what unified this period were the Government's attempts to forestall anything happening that might threaten to destroy either the League of Nations or the Stresa Front. This first decision situation was one of possible conflict. It ended at the beginning of October when the Italian invasion of Ethiopia turned this possibility into a reality.

The occasion for decision that began this situation was the Wal Wal incident and the subsequent exchange of notes and demands between Italy and Ethiopia. From the point of view of the British decision-makers, this occasion for decision possessed the following structural characteristics:

- anticipation: nil. Such skirmishes were relatively common in this part of the world with its nomadic tribes and unmarked borders, but the Wal Wal incident had immediate repercussions, in terms of the exchange of notes between Rome and Addis Ababa, that came as a surprise to a Foreign Office which did not even have an Ethiopian Department.<sup>1</sup>
- reaction time: lengthy and adequate. Not until the summer of 1935 did the Government begin to feel any constraints of time. In itself, the occasion for decision did not carry with it any inherent time limits or sense of urgency. Even in the worst possible case, anticipated by Sir John Simon but not by the Cabinet as a whole or by the Ambassador in Rome, hostilities could not begin until the end of the rainy season ten months in the future. Italy, needing first to build up her war machine in East Africa, could not launch an invasion before the rains started and would have to wait for them to stop. Ten months were adequate for avoiding or defusing any problems.



threat: low. As of Wal Wal, it was by no means obvious that there was any threat to Ethiopia. Certainly, the wider and much more critical threats to British foreign policy and to the European and world balance of power did not emerge until several months later.

In terms of this analysis, the occasion for decision was not a crisis problem, and the entire period was not a crisis situation.

On 3 October, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia presented the British Government with the start of a second decision situation, which lasted until the Hoare-Laval Plan produced a further transformation. The intervening two months can be divided into three clear stages: pre-election, election, and post-election. Nonetheless, this span of time forms one coherent whole: unified by the Government's continued pursual of the dual line of policy in order to end the war while simultaneously supporting and preserving Stresa and the League. Publically, at home and in Geneva, they supported Ethiopia and the cause of justice and collective security; and, in the person of Anthony Eden, they took the lead at the League of Nations in implementing sanctions. Privately, however, they were reluctant to take any step against Italy that might alienate the French, lead to a 'mad dog' act in the Mediterranean, and shatter the Stresa Front; thus, in Paris, Peterson continued to search for that elusive compromise solution satisfactory to Italy, Ethiopia, and the League.

The occasion for decision which began this second decision situation was the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Structurally, it displayed the following characteristics:

anticipation: considerable. As early as January of 1935, Sir John Simon had foreseen the invasion, and in May he had warned the Cabinet that it would probably happen around the beginning of October. Initially, Ministers had discounted Simon's warning. However, as the summer came and went, expectations of war rose. By the time the Committee of Five failed in September to find an acceptable compromise, the probability had become a certainty.

reaction time: lengthy and adequate. As an occasion for decision, the invasion neither carried any inherent time limits nor suggested that task complexity would render reaction time for the British Government inadequate. Ample time existed for a solution to the problem to emerge from the measures adopted either in Paris or in Geneva. The expert consensus held that the Italians would require at least two dry seasons of campaigning to conquer and subdue Ethiopia: sufficient time for sanctions to bite or for a compromise to be found. As late as 27 November, the British military attaché in Addis Ababa was speculating that 'the ultimate end of the war will turn more on the collapse of administrative organization than upon the defeat of the field army. At some period, the Italians may well find themselves in a situation similar as [sic] that of Napoleon before Moscow; or of the French armies in Spain during our Peninsular Campaign'.<sup>2</sup>

threat: high. The invasion posed a severe threat to the goals of the British Government. This had nothing to do with the fate of Ethiopia, the importance of which to Britain had already been discounted by the Maffey Report. Rather, the invasion threatened to destroy either the League of Nations or the Stresa Front - both of which, for different reasons, the Government felt were crucial to preserve.

Despite its significance, the invasion was not a crisis problem.

Surprise was low and reaction time lengthy. Thus, the post-invasion period was equally not a crisis situation. It was characterized by continued attempts on the part of the Government to pursue their policy of dualism, and it lasted until the Hoare-Laval Plan threatened to force them to choose one line or the other.

The final decision situation of the case study covered the period of the Hoare-Laval crisis: from Sunday 8 December to Thursday 19 December, 1935. The occasion for decision which began this situation was the initialling of the Hoare-Laval Plan and the release of the communiqué at the end of the Paris talks which publically announced to the world that terms had been arrived at and that the British Foreign Secretary was committed to them. The situation ended eleven days later when the Foreign Secretary made his resignation speech, the Government survived the vote of censure in the House of Commons, and the peace



proposals were interred as a dead issue. This period had two major stages: the first being concerned merely with the fate of the Plan; the second, following the meeting on Tuesday 17 December of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Conservative Party, broadened the scope of the problem to include the fate of the Government. Nonetheless, these twelve days of crisis form one overall decision situation. The initialling of the Plan transformed the old situation into a new one. Not only were the Government now presented with the first set of peace proposals since the abortive attempt of the Committee of Five before the invasion, but also they now faced a possibly fatal threat to their dualism: the Plan threatened to make them decide between Stresa and the League - and possibly to destroy both. The unity of the subsequent twelve days lay in the fact that they covered the lifespan of the Hoare-Laval Plan and its immediate consequences for the British Government. The structural characteristics of the occasion for decision were

anticipation: nil. With the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent that enough signals were given in advance that the Cabinet ought to have expected firm proposals to have emerged from the Paris talks. In fact, however, they did not. And they certainly did not expect Hoare's public commitment. The Hoare-Laval Plan and the subsequent communiqué took them by surprise. As Neville Chamberlain wrote to his sister on 15 December 1935, 'when Sam left for Paris on Saturday the 7th, we had no idea that he would be invited to consider detailed peace proposals'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, on 7 January 1936, Stanley Baldwin told his close friend Tom Jones that 'Hoare told me that he would take the opportunity of seeing Laval on his way to Switzerland, that there was nothing to settle, and he had told Anthony [Eden] not to worry: "I am not going to commit you to anything"'.<sup>4</sup>

reaction time: closed-ended, short, and inadequate for task complexity. The Cabinet had to make an immediate decision, before they could consult with the Foreign Secretary and in advance of knowing the reaction to the proposals of the League, the United States, the Italian and Ethiopian governments, and British domestic opinion. As the India Secretary wrote at the time: 'We were given no time for

thought, since we were told that Paris must be informed immediately of our decision'.<sup>5</sup> The severe constraints on reaction time stemmed from three factors: first, the inherent nature of the Hoare-Laval Plan required speed for its success; second, the upcoming meeting of the Committee of Eighteen in Geneva on Thursday 12 December to decide upon, inter alia, the oil sanction imposed an absolute and very near deadline for making some sort of decision; and third, any failure to have reacted immediately would have been tantamount to disowning Sir Samuel Hoare - ruining his reputation and his future effectiveness; in the words of Neville Chamberlain: 'a set of proposals was agreed to, and enough was allowed by the French to leak out to the press to make it impossible for us to amend the proposals, or even to defer accepting them, without throwing over our Foreign Secretary'.<sup>6</sup>

threat:

high. From at least as early as 22 August, the Government had been pursuing a policy of dualism. Their entire strategy hinged upon their ability successfully to balance the elements of this double line. The public nature of the Hoare-Laval Plan threatened to push them one way or the other. Either Stresa or the League might well have to go. Neither alternative was felt to be acceptable. As they realized at their first Cabinet meeting of the period, while no problem would result if Italy, Ethiopia and the League all accepted the terms, it was highly unlikely that the latter two would. Thus, if Britain approved the terms and the Italians accepted them while the League and the Emperor rejected them, the results could be very unfortunate. The war would continue; the French would likely not consent to further sanctions and might refuse to proceed further with present ones; the sanctions front would be broken and the League at best weakened and at worst exposed as an empty sham; and if Britain still attempted to pursue effective anti-Italian measures she would have to face a Mediterranean war without French support. On the other hand, if the Government rejected the proposals, the consequences, it was felt, would be no more attractive. The reputation of the Foreign Secretary would be shattered; the French would refuse to continue with sanctions and thereby split the League; the French would similarly refuse to co-operate with Britain in the Mediterranean; the excuse for postponing the oil embargo would disappear; and the Italians would be enraged and the Stresa Front destroyed. The Hoare-Laval Plan threatened to undermine the entire basis of British foreign policy: to shatter at least one if not both of the two strands of the Government's policy of dualism.



As an occasion for decision, the Hoare-Laval Plan bore all the hallmarks of a crisis: it surprised the Government; it threatened highly important national goals; and it required a quick reaction with inadequate time to make it. The problem was a crisis, and the subsequent decision situation was a crisis situation.

The following chart summarizes the nature of the three decision situations against which the empirical propositions will shortly be tested:

Decision Situation	Occasion for Decision	Structural Characteristics of the Occasion for Decision
December 1934 to October 1935	Wal Wal incident and the subsequent exchange of notes between Italy and Ethiopia	anticipation: surprise reaction time: lengthy and adequate threat: low therefore not a crisis
3 October to 8 December, 1935	The Italian invasion of Ethiopia	anticipation: considerable reaction time: lengthy and adequate threat: high therefore not a crisis
Hoare-Laval crisis: 8-19 December 1935	The Hoare-Laval Plan and the subsequent communiqué	anticipation: <u>surprise</u> reaction time: <u>closed-ended, short, and inadequate</u> threat: <u>high</u> therefore a <u>crisis</u>

From the point of view of the British Government, the twelve months of the case study divide naturally into three decision situations. Of these, one was a crisis and two were not. The first requirement for testing the propositions is satisfied. A basis of comparison exists for judging differences between crisis and non-crisis decision-making processes.

The second requirement necessary for testing the propositions is a high degree of similarity between the crisis and non-crisis situations. As noted above in Chapter One, five factors directly influence the process of decision-making. The first two of these form the decision-making system, including on the one hand its organizational structure and on the other the personalities and beliefs of the individual decision-makers. The third is the substantive nature of the occasion for decision. The fourth consists of the structural characteristics of the occasion for decision: anticipation, reaction time, and threat. Finally, conditions in the internal and external environments are the fifth determining factor. While exerting no direct influence, they will affect the perceptions and beliefs of the decision-makers and thus indirectly influence the decision-making process. Any differences in the decision-making process between two situations could reflect differences in any of these factors. Thus, if one is testing, as in this work, the effects on the decision-making process of alterations only in threat, anticipation and reaction time - the three characteristics which distinguish crises from non-crises - then differences in the other possible causal factors ought to be minimal: or at least sufficiently few that they can be identified and their potential influence discounted. In other words, between the crisis and non-crisis situations to be used for testing the propositions, differences should be small in:



1. the nature of the decision-making system;
2. the substance of the occasion for decision; and
3. conditions in the internal and external environments.

Because of these requirements, the primary evidence for testing the propositions will come from the post-invasion and crisis situations. Between these two, similarities are great and differences as limited as can reasonably be expected in the real world.

#### 1. the decision-making system

After the November election, Baldwin's new Government remained very similar to the old one. Only one old face, Londonderry, left the Cabinet, and only one new one, Duff Cooper, entered it. In terms of office, J.H. Thomas and Malcolm MacDonald switched roles, the former becoming Colonial Secretary and the latter Dominions Secretary; and Halifax replaced Londonderry as Lord Privy Seal and leader of the House of Lords, in turn to be succeeded at the War Office by Duff Cooper. Otherwise, the decision-making system after the election was identical to what it had been before. Vansittart continued to dominate the Foreign Office; Hoare and Eden still maintained their unfortunate duality of office; the Admiralty and the Air Ministry remained in the hands of Monsell and Swinton; and Stanley Baldwin was still Prime Minister. The only significant difference between the two decision situations was a fluke, an accident of history: the Foreign Secretary, having fallen while ice skating the day after his arrival in Switzerland and broken his nose, was absent from London for the first eight days of the crisis and did not attend a single Cabinet meeting even after his return.

## 2. the substance of the occasion for decision

Substantively, the two occasions for decision in question possessed an underlying similarity. Both marked turning-points in the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, and both were concerned with the very fundamental issue of war and peace. Thus, apples are being compared with apples and not with oranges. As both the invasion and the Hoare-Laval Plan were important events in the same basic issue, the consequent decision-making processes may be compared. However, despite their fundamental similarity, these occasions for decision did have two distinct differences. First, the invasion was a transition from peace, however fragile, to war, whereas the peace proposals were intended to end that war and restore peace (though not the status quo ante). Second, the invasion was an Italian action directed towards Ethiopia, but the Hoare-Laval Plan was an Anglo-French project. It was Mussolini who presented the British Government with the problem of war; but it was M. Laval and Sir Samuel Hoare, their own Foreign Secretary, who presented them with the problem of the Paris peace proposals.

## 3. environmental conditions

Conditions in the internal and external environments can be compared in two slightly different ways. On the one hand, one can look for differences at the time of the two occasions for decision; on the other hand, one can look to see what alterations in the environment occurred between the invasion and the end of the Hoare-Laval crisis. In the first sense, those differences that might have exerted some influence on the decision-making process can be easily identified. Internally, the invasion took place prior to the election, whereas the Plan was initialled only after the Government had been safely returned to office for another term. Externally, the so-called 'moral mandate'



was granted by the League to the British and French governments at the beginning of November; sanctions, only a future probability at the time of the invasion, had become an operating reality by the time of the peace proposals; and, by the eve of the Foreign Secretary's departure for Paris, the oil sanction had developed into the most immediately crucial issue of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. In the second sense - differences from the invasion to the end of the crisis - two further environmental differences can be identified. First, the Cabinet's initial acceptance of the Hoare-Laval Plan led to the indefinite postponement of the oil embargo; for the last few days of the crisis, this issue - and hence the threat of a Mediterranean war - declined greatly in importance in the calculations of the British decision-makers. Second, the last half of the crisis was characterized by the backbench revolt among the Tory Party and the threat to the Government of defeat in the vote of censure in the House of Commons. Throughout the post-invasion and the first half of the crisis situations, the Government had been vitally concerned with public opinion in general; by the end of the crisis, however, they were also concerned, indeed petrified, about opinion among their own supporters in Parliament. Unlike opposition from the Labour Party or, except during the general election, from the general public, opposition among the rank and file of Conservative M.P.s could have immediate repercussions: the latter group had the power to force the Government out of office.

In toto, then, there were seven significant differences between the post-invasion and post-Plan situations which might very well have had a substantial effect upon the decision-making process:

1. the fact that the invasion marked the beginning of war whereas the Plan was an attempt to end it;



2. the fact that the invasion was an Italian action whereas the Plan came from Hoare and Laval;
3. the occurrence of the general election between the invasion and the peace proposals;
4. the coming to fruition of the Plan after the 'moral mandate' and after sanctions had been in operation for some time;
5. the shifting importance and likelihood of the oil embargo;
6. the emergence of the possibility of a backbench revolt during the final stage of the crisis period; and
7. the absence of the Foreign Secretary.

In evaluating the results of testing the propositions (a task postponed until the next chapter), these seven factors must be taken into account. It may be they and not the transition from non-crisis to crisis which account for observed differences in the decision-making processes during the post-invasion and post-Plan situations.

Despite these differences, the similarities between the two situations are sufficiently great to provide a clear basis for comparison. The differences, while potentially significant, are few enough that they may be taken into account and their probable influences identified. Therefore, the second requirement necessary for testing the propositions is satisfied.

Unfortunately, the decision-making process during the first decision situation is not so directly comparable with that during the crisis. A few differences between the two situations could be noted and compensated for. However, there are three fundamental reasons which make comparisons very difficult. First, for the initial six months of the post-Wal Wal period, the decision-making system differed considerably from the form it took during the crisis. Until the Cabinet reshuffle of 7 June, not only did the dualism at the Foreign Office not exist but

also the identities of some of the crucial role holders, including the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, differed. Second, the Wal Wal incident, the occasion for decision which began this situation, did not signify a choice between war and peace in East Africa and certainly did not threaten to produce Anglo-Italian fighting in the Mediterranean. Third, environmental conditions, and thus attitudes both of decision-makers and of the public, were very dissimilar. Internally, as of the Wal Wal incident, public opinion had not yet seen the importance of the problem or formed an attitude towards it; the results of the peace ballot were still in the future; and the Government were not bound by any electoral promises or public pronouncements on the matter. Only in the summer of 1935 did public opinion become mobilized and highly vocal in support of Ethiopia. Externally, it was only post-Wal Wal that the Franco-Italian understanding and military agreements as well as the Stresa Front (under that name) came into existence, that the British Government published the White Paper on Defence, that Germany denounced the Treaty of Versailles, and that Italy began to build up her military strength in East Africa. In general, this first decision situation was characterized by the possibility of war rather than by war itself, and only during the summer was the policy of dualism firmly established and the first attempt at a compromise solution made.

The historical evidence fulfils the two necessary requirements. The propositions may confidently be tested against the non-crisis situation following the invasion and the crisis situation following the Hoare-Laval Plan. The first decision situation, however, is not quite so useful. It can be used impressionistically, and it can be used against the validity of any of the propositions. It cannot reliably be used in support of them, because differences between it



and the crisis are a) so great as to ensure that differences should exist in the process of decision-making, and b) too fundamental to be reliably taken into account and compensated for.

## B - Testing the Propositions

### i - Cognitive

#### Proposition 1.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker narrows his focus of attention in terms of space: the boundaries of relevance he places upon his situation are much more restrictive, and he concentrates on a smaller section of the environment.

Mixed results. During the crisis situation as opposed to the post-invasion situation, the decision-makers devoted a much higher proportion of their time and energy to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. It dominated their thoughts and actions. In this sense, they narrowed their focus of attention. However, the boundaries of relevance they placed on the Italo-Ethiopian conflict itself were no more restrictive than previously. Following the invasion, the Government concerned themselves with six considerations: the actions of the League in imposing sanctions and bringing pressure to bear upon Italy; the probable success and likely effects of an oil embargo (including the chances of American co-operation); the consequent possibility of an Italian 'mad dog' act in the Mediterranean against the British fleet; the willingness of the French to provide military support in the event of such hostilities; the Paris discussions aimed at negotiating a compromise solution to end the fighting; and last but certainly not least the pressure of domestic opinion. During the crisis, Ministers focused on the same issues. They were apprehensive about an unpleasant reaction at Geneva and the break



up of the League; they worried about the oil sanction, tended to doubt that the United States government would support it, and were not unhappy to see it postponed indefinitely; they continued to fear a Mediterranean war and felt that the French government would not provide any support; they discussed the peace proposals which were the outcome of the Paris talks; and they were vitally concerned with domestic opinion and their own survival. Not all Ministers worried equally about every one of these problems; however, each occupied himself with the same ones during both decision situations. Thus, in response to a problem which they defined as a crisis, the decision-makers narrowed their focus of attention to concentrate on the issues involved in that problem, but within that problem they did not further restrict their boundaries of relevance.

#### Proposition 2.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker narrows his focus of attention in terms of time: he concentrates much more on the short run and places a higher discount on the future.

Not supported. At first glance, the evidence may seem to support this proposition. After all, by the final few days of the crisis, the Cabinet's behaviour reflected their fears about their immediate survival. However, a closer look at the evidence indicates a) that during the post-invasion situation the Cabinet were also vitally concerned with certain short-run factors and b) that during the crisis long-term influences were far from negligible. Following the invasion, there were several examples of how the short term decisively influenced the Cabinet's decisions and actions. During the campaigning for the general election, Ministers were too busy to pay attention to the Ethiopian affair and concentrated on the immediate task of re-election;

purely as an electoral safeguard, Peterson was withdrawn from Paris; and Stanley Baldwin, whose real feelings towards the League of Nations were lukewarm at best, pledged himself and his Government to support both it and the principles for which it stood. Similarly basing their behaviour on the short term, the Cabinet's attitude towards sanctions at their meetings in October after the invasion and before the dissolution of Parliament varied directly and immediately - as the minutes clearly indicate - with their latest beliefs concerning the likelihood of French military support for Britain.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the impetus behind the timing of the Hoare-Laval Plan owed much to short-run factors. As early as the last week of October, outlines of similar proposals - the outcome of the Peterson-Saint Quentin talks in Paris - had appeared in the British press. What produced the actual Plan only at the beginning of December was not that it had taken all that extra time to iron out the details but rather the imminence of the oil embargo combined with the safe return of the Government to office. Short-term factors exercised an important influence during both the post-invasion and crisis situations. On the other hand, long-term considerations proved crucial during the crisis period. It is likely that the initial support for the peace proposals from Monsell stemmed from his continuing long-run interest of not weakening British defences - so vital for the future against Germany and Japan - in a Mediterranean war with Italy. At the Cabinet meeting of Wednesday 11 December 1935, Ministers discussed 'the long range aspects of the question, namely, as to the effect of what happened now on deterring aggression'.<sup>8</sup> Even at the crucial final meeting of the crisis, when Ministers were concerned primarily with their own survival, their demand for Hoare's resignation had an important long-run basis.<sup>9</sup> One of the principal reasons behind this demand was the Foreign



Secretary's insistence on still supporting the Plan as correct and on publically making the point that no other nation had moved any military forces or was prepared to oppose Italy and come to the aid of Britain. Ministers were in accord with Ramsay MacDonald's remark that such a speech would make Britain's position impossible at Geneva and with the United States. It would have 'a shattering effect in Europe', said Walter Elliot; and Halifax emphasized that the whole moral position of the Government before the world lay at stake. Similarly, the Foreign Secretary, as he later wrote in his memoirs, continued to believe even at the very end that the Plan was absolutely necessary in view of the most critical of long-term factors: the German threat.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Baldwin himself later told a friend that it was this very consideration which he had had in mind when he had said that his lips were sealed.<sup>11</sup>

The terms 'long run' and 'short run' are relative and vague. In any given set of circumstances, it can be extremely difficult to distinguish the two and discern which is more important - especially as decision-makers take certain assumptions as so basic and obvious as not to be worth mentioning. Nevertheless, the evidence from the case study clearly fails to support the hypothesis that the short run ought to be more prominent in crises.

### Proposition 3.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is much more likely to rely upon his experience, his theories, and his knowledge of historical parallels.

Not supported. During the crisis, Stanley Baldwin probably, though there is no conclusive evidence, interpreted the possibility of Sir Austen Chamberlain's leading a backbench revolt in terms of his own actions at the Carlton Club thirteen years previously when he and Bonar Law had destroyed Lloyd George's coalition. However, during the



post-invasion situation, Baldwin's attitude to the League, sanctions, and the oil embargo similarly hinged upon his belief in American power and the importance of Britain's always maintaining friendly relations with that country. As he publically stated on 23 November, 'never as an individual will I sanction the British navy being used for an armed blockade of any country in the world until I know what the United States of America is going to do'.<sup>12</sup> This attitude can be traced back virtually as far as Baldwin's Carlton Club experience: to 1923 and his settlement of the American debt on terms that almost caused Law to resign. Furthermore, as early as the beginning of June, even before the failure of peace attempts and the outbreak of war, the Cabinet divided into three groups, based not on different information but on different images of reality:

Some, Chamberlain, Eden and Eustace Percy (Baldwin's intended Ambassador to the United States) among them, were strongly in favour of action against Italy through the League; others, including MacDonald, spoke more cautiously and emphasized the Stresa Front; on the other hand, Runciman and Eyres-Monsell were opposed to anything which might lead to the imposition of sanctions against Italy. Eyres-Monsell indeed, concerned as much for the sea route to the East as with the Italian presence on the Brenner, was among the foremost advocates of Vansittart's type of 'realism'. Eden's advocacy of the League was, he claimed, pandering to illusion.<sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt that the experiences, the theories, and the historical parallels available to decision-makers crucially influence their behaviour. Hoare and Eden, both at the Foreign Office and privy to the same information, held very different attitudes on the relative merits of Stresa and the League. For all their importance, however, these factors do not seem to weigh more heavily with decision-makers during crisis than during non-crisis situations.

Proposition 4.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is more likely to misperceive and misinterpret his environment in order to reconcile conflicting goals.

Not supported. Following the invasion, the Government made at least two serious errors of judgement. They believed that both Stresa and the League could be preserved and thus continued to pursue their double line; and they felt that at least two dry seasons of campaigning would be necessary for the conquest of Ethiopia. In response to the peace proposals, Ministers hoped to avoid a confrontation with public opinion while using the Plan to get face-to-face negotiations started at Geneva between Italy and Ethiopia. No doubt they were much too optimistic about the likely consequences of their behaviour, but they did not delude themselves any more than they had after the invasion. Similarly, the indirect evidence of testing the first two propositions indicates that after the invasion decision-makers did not narrow their foci of attention either in space or in time. In sum, the evidence does not suggest that misperceptions and misinterpretations were any greater following the Plan than they had been following the invasion.

Proposition 5.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is much more likely to alter the salience of his goals: by thereby reducing value conflicts, he provides himself with psychological reassurance and minimizes stress.

Supported. Instead of compensating for conflicting goals and values by altering his view of the environment, a decision-maker may achieve the same result by changing the importance he places upon one or more of his goals. With one very crucial exception, the evidence fails to support this hypothesis. The exception, however, definitely supports



this proposition. Following the Hoare-Laval Plan, the Cabinet based their initial decision to support these proposals upon a goal which had never before during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict been particularly prominent: Cabinet solidarity. They supported the Foreign Secretary and his terms because they felt that they could not condemn a Minister and force his resignation without giving him a chance to defend himself.

#### Proposition 6.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is much more likely to try to find an alternative which satisfies all his goals even if it is not optimal for any particular one.

Not supported. It can be argued that the response of the Government to the Hoare-Laval Plan was a satisficing one. At the first Cabinet meeting of the crisis, while some Ministers like the absent First Lord supported the peace proposals completely and others in accord with the Chancellor of the Exchequer wanted to reject them out of hand, the majority agreed with the satisficing strategy proposed by Eden and backed by Baldwin. They compromised and approved of the substance of the Hoare-Laval Plan while drastically altering the procedures for handling it. However, and this is the key point, this satisficing behaviour did not differ in the least from the post-invasion strategy of the Government: the pursuit of the double line. Even Neville Chamberlain, basically a pro-Leaguer and the Minister who led the initial argument during the crisis for rejecting the proposals, agreed at an informal meeting of Ministers on Friday 29 November that Hoare might delay implementation of the oil embargo in order to allow the Paris talks to investigate further the possibility of a compromise, peaceful settlement. The Government did not adopt a satisficing strategy during the crisis to any greater extent than they had during the post-invasion situation.

Proposition 7.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the decision-maker is much more likely to rely upon emotional responses and 'gut reactions'.

Supported. A final method decision-makers may use for dealing with cognitive complexity and multiple stakes is to resort to emotional responses - 'gut reactions'. The Cabinet did precisely this at the beginning of the Hoare-Laval crisis. Uncertain about exactly what had happened in Paris and torn by conflicting goals, Ministers were at a loss as to what to do. They resorted to feelings of loyalty and Cabinet solidarity to make the crucial decision to support the peace proposals. This was an emotional not a rational reaction. The critical factor was the feeling that a sick, absent, and highly regarded colleague ought not to be rejected without an opportunity to defend himself. As Baldwin said, they had 'either to ratify or disown Sam'.<sup>14</sup> No comparable reliance on emotion occurred at any other point from the Wal Wal incident to the end of the Hoare-Laval crisis.

ii - OrganizationalProposition 8.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, organizational routine will be disrupted and be replaced by extraordinary and ad hoc procedures.

Supported. During the crisis, decision-making routine demonstrated three unusual characteristics. On Tuesday 10 December, Peterson specially attended the Cabinet at Baldwin's request; the following Monday an informal meeting of several but not all Cabinet Ministers took place; and during the entire period the Cabinet formally met five times - an inordinate number for only twelve days. While all three



examples differ from a hypothetical norm, the first two have parallels in a previous decision situation: Drummond attended a Cabinet meeting in May, and an equally important informal Ministerial get together was held just prior to the crucial Cabinet of 22 August. However, the frequency of meetings finds no parallel elsewhere and stands as an anomaly: a significant disruption of decision-making routine.

Proposition 9.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the level of decision rises in the organizational hierarchy: authority becomes more centralized.

Not supported. On this point, the dividing line was not the Hoare-Laval Plan and the beginning of the crisis but rather Simon's memorandum of the previous May which turned the Italo-Ethiopian conflict into a Cabinet matter. Before that, the problem had been primarily a Foreign Office concern; subsequently, the level of decision remained unchanged by the onset of crisis. Eden and Hoare, together with Vansittart, decided upon Eden's mission to Rome at the end of June with the Zeila proposals; the Cabinet authorized this attempt at a solution, and then Eden actually went and dealt with Mussolini. Similarly, Eden initially recommended acceptance of the Hoare-Laval Plan and alterations in its procedures; the Cabinet approved; and then Eden handled the implementation of policy. Another example: the 22 August meeting of the Cabinet formalized the dual line of policy created at the Foreign Office; Hoare then interpreted his mandate in such a manner as to bluff at Geneva in support of Ethiopia at the meeting of the League in September, to agree with Laval not to impose any measure that might lead to war with Italy, and to send a message of friendship to Mussolini. The 2 December meeting of the Cabinet likewise authorized Hoare's intention to proceed to Paris and 'press the matter forward as rapidly as possible';<sup>15</sup>

he then went to meet Laval and eventually initialled the Hoare-Laval Plan. Similarly, during the crisis, the Cabinet agreed with Eden's proposed line at Geneva and confirmed it in general instructions, which Eden then interpreted in such a manner as to virtually ask the League of Nations to reject the peace proposals. After Simon's memorandum of May, the level of decision stayed the same.

Proposition 10.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, group processes rise in importance: the four analytical operations are conducted more by groups and less by departments or individuals, and the group is more likely to initiate policy.

Supported. The results of the previous proposition indicate that the level of decision had reached the Cabinet during May and thereafter remained constant. During this period of time, with only one exception, the Cabinet as a group did not initiate major changes of policy; its role remained constant. Ministers primarily discussed and authorized proposals put to them by the Foreign Office and its two Ministers. The one exception, however, furnishes the evidence in support of this proposition. The decision to force Hoare's resignation came from the Cabinet as a group and was not put to them for approval. Baldwin and Chamberlain, who opened discussions at that crucial meeting of Wednesday 18 December, both supported the Foreign Secretary. Ministers refused to agree and insisted that Hoare had to go. Thus, though the crisis did not alter the level of decision, it did produce one important and significant rise in the importance of group processes.



Proposition 11.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, ad hoc groups are more likely to be formed.

Not supported. An ad hoc group did meet during the crisis on the evening of Monday 16 December. However, comparable ad hoc groups also met just before the two important Cabinet sessions of 22 August and 2 December. Ad hoc groups are not in Britain, as they are in the United States, a normal feature of the decision-making process. The evidence definitely fails to support this proposition.

Proposition 12.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the frequency of interaction among members of the group increases: a much greater need is felt for face-to-face proximity.

Supported. Formally and informally during the crisis, the Cabinet met an inordinate number of times.

Proposition 13.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, group cohesion is much greater: with the result that dissent tends to be stifled and group goals and values take on a superordinate role.

Supported. The decisive reason for the Cabinet's initial approval of the Hoare-Laval Plan was group solidarity. Ministers closed ranks around one of their own. Dissent, however, did exist. Neville Chamberlain, for one, disagreed with the majority and wanted to reject the peace proposals no matter the cost to the Foreign Secretary. Furthermore, the initial support for Hoare soon reversed itself, and some of the younger members of the Cabinet went so far as to push the lobby correspondent of The Times against the Paris terms. As the days of the crisis passed, dissent intensified and Ministers rebelled, demanding not only the rejection of the Plan but also the resignation

of the Foreign Secretary. However, this demand, at the final Cabinet meeting of the crisis, can also be interpreted as a further, if different, indication of increased group cohesion: Ministers came to view group survival as a superordinate goal and united in insisting that the Foreign Secretary go that they might remain in office. In two ways (and especially the first), the evidence supports this proposition.

#### Proposition 14.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the group leader is more likely to accept responsibility, and followers are more likely to expect and accept this.

Supported. The group in question was, of course, the Cabinet, and there can be no doubt that Baldwin was its leader, by virtue both of his position and of his character. His leadership style was to pick his Ministers and then to let them get on with the job with a minimum of interference; nevertheless, they knew that the Prime Minister's support was likely to prove decisive on any contentious issue. The evidence on this proposition is not conclusive - partly because of the nature of Baldwin's style - but it tends to support the hypothesis. During the crisis, he played an immediately more important role than previously. He assumed responsibility for the Foreign Office during the few days when Hoare, Eden, and Vansittart were all absent from the country. He acted as chief Government spokesman and made the major speeches in the House of Commons. He summoned Hoare back to London. And, at the end of the crisis, he took the actions necessary to safeguard the Government's survival: persuading Hoare with the offer of an eventual return to the Cabinet not to embarrass the Government, and bribing Sir Austen Chamberlain into supporting them by promising him the Foreign Office. Similarly, other Ministers relied very heavily upon Stanley Baldwin. Eden immediately consulted him when he first learned



of unexpected developments in Paris, and he also took good care to secure the Prime Minister's authorization in advance of arranging changes in the procedures for handling the proposals. The Cabinet as a whole relied on Baldwin to be their spokesman as well as to deal with Hoare upon his return. And during the final meeting of the crisis, Halifax carried a lot of weight when he said that 'if the Prime Minister were to lose his personal position, one of our national anchors would have dragged'. On the other hand, there does exist one telling piece of evidence against this proposition: Hoare's resignation was forced upon the Prime Minister by the overwhelming pressure of Cabinet opinion. Baldwin wanted the Foreign Secretary to stay; his followers forced him to kick Hoare out. This counter-example is quite strong. Combined with the difficulties of gauging Baldwin's true influence, it weighs heavily against this proposition. Nevertheless, on balance, the evidence does tend to support it.

#### Proposition 15.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, departmental autonomy and bureaucratic politics are likely to decline in importance.

Supported. The evidence in favour of this proposition is extremely weak. Bureaucratic politics never played a major role in British policy towards the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. In so far as Ministers' positions reflected departmental interests (notably with Swinton at the Air Ministry and Monsell at the Admiralty), no differences existed between the post-invasion and crisis situations. The major conflict was not inter-departmental but within the Foreign Office between Hoare and Eden. Their differences before the Plan, where Eden took the lead at Geneva, continued in the same vein after it, when he did his best to reduce the force of the peace proposals. There was, however, between

the two situations a slight decline in departmental autonomy. Eden still acted on his own to a large extent: on his own authority sending that telegram to Barton informing the latter about the ban on construction of a railroad; taking the line he thought best at Geneva; and determining along with Foreign Office officials and without consulting the Cabinet the contents of the White Paper. Nevertheless, as the previous proposition indicates, Baldwin did take more of a direct hand in foreign policy than he normally did, and the Cabinet as a whole kept themselves more au courant with matters than they had for the several weeks of the election campaign during the previous decision situation. This evidence is weak and far from conclusive, but it does provide some support for the proposition.

### iii - Analytical

#### Proposition 16.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the search for information will be greatly intensified.

Supported. During the crisis, Ministers were quite concerned with gathering information. In the first few days, Eden carried on several lengthy and detailed exchanges with Paris. On the morning of Monday 9 December, Baldwin specially went over to the Foreign Office to have Eden explain exactly what had transpired. The following day, the Prime Minister asked Peterson to attend the Cabinet in order to fill in gaps in Ministers' knowledge. The Prime Minister also requested the Foreign Secretary to return to England from Switzerland; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer went several times to see him and find out his views upon his arrival home. Finally, towards the end of the crisis, the Cabinet



specifically asked Baldwin to visit Hoare and clarify certain matters with him. After the invasion, Ministers were also very concerned with amassing information, particularly with respect to the Mediterranean situation and the likelihood of French military co-operation and support. There was, however, a lapse of several weeks, due to the exigencies of the election, during which Ministers outside of the Foreign Office payed very little attention to the Italo-Ethiopian problem. Contrasted with this period, the crisis did witness an intensification of the search for information.

Proposition 17.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, decision-makers will tend to simplify the complexity of the environment.

Not supported. The definition of the situation held by the decision-makers in response to the Hoare-Laval Plan was no simpler than that formulated by them after the invasion. Both the results of testing the cognitive propositions and the nature of the empirical evidence itself indicate that the onset of crisis did not lead the Cabinet to reduce their conception of the complexity of the environment. In fact, one can make an excellent case that the initial decision to approve the Paris proposals - a decision taken primarily on the emotional basis of loyalty to the Foreign Secretary - provides further proof that the decision-makers fully realized and could not deal with the complexity of the environment.

Proposition 18.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, information moves with greater speed to the top of the organizational hierarchy.

Supported. During the crisis, information moved quickly and quite accurately to the Cabinet. Eden circulated copies of his telegrams to Paris and of Vansittart's replies. He also cabled from Geneva, immediately and in some detail, his findings at the League. Swinton reported on the progress of the air talks in Paris. Malcolm MacDonald presented the views of the Dominions' High Commissioners. British embassies around the world informed London of the impressions that the peace proposals had made abroad. And Neville Chamberlain reported in great detail to the Cabinet on the tone and content of Hoare's proposed speech to the House of Commons. This evidence, while inconclusive in itself, is quite telling when combined with the fact that the Paris talks between Peterson and Saint Quentin were not even discussed in Cabinet during the election campaign and that the Maffey Report, commissioned in March and completed by 18 June, was not circulated to the Cabinet until the end of August.

Proposition 19.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the reliability of the source of information is of greater importance for judging the validity of its content.

Supported. In their initial decision to support the Hoare-Laval Plan, Ministers' distaste for the proposals was greatly tempered by their faith in the Foreign Secretary. They relied on his reputation for good judgement, and they felt that something, as yet unknown to them, must have happened in Paris to have led Hoare to take the action that he did.



Proposition 20.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, greater variance is likely between the operational and psychological environments of the decision-makers.

- Not supported. The results of testing the cognitive propositions indicate the lack of empirical support for this one. The same is suggested by the testing of Proposition 17, the lack of simplification of the environment. A direct look at the evidence leads to the same conclusion. Ministers may not have anticipated the extent of adverse reaction to the peace proposals, but they were certainly aware that the terms would not receive the warmest of receptions. During the crisis, their misperceptions were certainly no worse than they had been earlier with respect to their beliefs that the policy of dualism could succeed or that Italy would require at least two dry seasons of campaigning in order fully to conquer Ethiopia.

Proposition 21.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, even when substantive issues are similar, the goals and values which are defined as relevant are likely to differ considerably.

Supported. Between the post-invasion and crisis situations, the goals and values which the decision-makers defined as important and relevant were very similar - with one exception: group cohesion. Initially, Ministers approved the Hoare-Laval Plan out of Cabinet solidarity and support for a sick, absent, and highly respected colleague. Subsequently, Ministers demanded the sacrifice of the Foreign Secretary that they as a group might survive.

Proposition 22.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, decision-makers are likely to formulate fewer alternatives.

Not supported. In response to the invasion, the Government considered two broad alternatives: to press forward with a League-oriented policy, despite the risk of a Mediterranean war, and hope that the pressure of sanctions would bite hard enough to cause the Italians to back down; or to go slowly on sanctions and try to arrange a compromise solution that would be satisfactory to Italy and acceptable to the League. In the end, the Government compromised between the two choices and continued with their dual line of policy. In the wake of the Hoare-Laval Plan, they initially also considered two broad alternatives: to approve or to reject the proposals. Again, they compromised: agreeing to the terms but insisting upon major alterations in procedure. Subdividing the issue does not change the results. The evidence does not support this proposition.

Proposition 23.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the choice of alternatives is less likely to be based on a rational, objective, and dispassionate means-ends analysis and more likely to be based on emotional and secondary considerations.

Supported. During the entire period from Wal Wal to the end of the Hoare-Laval crisis, one decision stands out as being predicated on emotional and secondary considerations: the initial decision to approve of the Paris peace proposals.



Proposition 24.

In crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, sensitivity to and learning from negative feedback are decreased: it tends either not to be noticed or to be discounted.

Not supported. Indeed, the major theme of the Hoare-Laval crisis is the way in which the adverse response to the Government's initial decision to approve the Plan led to retreat and eventually to reversal and rout.

\* \* \* \* \*

Twenty-four of the twenty-five propositions have now been tested against the historical evidence. In the next chapter, these results will be evaluated. Conclusions will then be presented on a) the final proposition, b) the validity of the theory of crisis decision-making used in this work, and c) the implications that the results of this study hold for any general theory of crisis decision-making.

Notes to Chapter Nine  
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1. For details on the eventual formation of an Ethiopian Department, see Maurice Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain, p. 113, and Geoffrey Thompson, Front-Line Diplomat, p. 94.
2. A despatch from Addis Ababa, registry number J 9573/1/1 to be found in the PRO in file number F.O. 371/19172.
3. Keith Feiling, Neville Chamberlain, p. 274.
4. Tom Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 158.
5. A letter from the Marquess of Zetland to the Viceroy of India, 20 December 1935: India Office Library. Quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, Baldwin: The Unexpected Prime Minister, p. 406.
6. Feiling, p. 274. Letter to his sister of 15 December 1935. My emphasis.
7. Cabinet 45(35), Wednesday 9 October; Cabinet 47(35), Wednesday 16 October; and Cabinet 48(35), Wednesday 23 October. The Cabinet did not meet again until 27 November.
8. Cabinet 54(35), Wednesday 11 December 1935.
9. Cabinet 56(35), Wednesday 18 December 1935.
10. Lord Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, p. 185.
11. Tom Jones, pp. 158-159. A conversation with Baldwin on 7 January 1936.
12. Quoted from Arnold Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs 1935, volume ii, p. 50.
13. Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin, p. 834.
14. Tom Jones, pp. 158-159. A conversation with Baldwin on 7 January 1936.
15. Cabinet 50(35), Monday 2 December 1935.



## Chapter Ten

### Evaluating the Empirical Results

Of the first twenty-four propositions, thirteen were supported; one yielded mixed results; and ten were not supported.

These findings do not provide conclusive proof of the theory of crisis decision-making. On the other hand, decision-makers are self-aware individuals and can recognize and compensate for some of the potential pit-falls facing their behaviour. Because of this possibility, there is good reason for not expecting the evidence to confirm all the propositions. Consequently, the results of testing the propositions are not necessarily unfavourable. Looking at them optimistically, one could conjecture that the supported propositions are of general validity and that the unsupported ones might hold for certain specific circumstances not found in this case study. At the very worst, the success rate of better than fifty per cent at least leaves the relationship between international crises and the process of foreign policy decision-making as an open question well worth a considerable amount of future investigation.

However, this conclusion changes dramatically when one tries to compensate for the probable effects of dissimilarities (other than those in threat, anticipation, and reaction time) between the post-invasion and crisis situations. Seven important differences



between the two have been identified in the previous chapter:

1. the fact that the invasion marked the beginning of war whereas the Plan was an attempt to end it;
2. the fact that the invasion was an Italian action whereas the Plan came from Hoare and Laval;
3. the occurrence of the general election between the invasion and the peace proposals;
4. the coming to fruition of the Plan after the 'moral mandate' and after sanctions had been in operation for some time;
5. the shifting importance and likelihood of the oil embargo;
6. the emergence of the possibility of a backbench revolt during the final stage of the crisis period; and
7. the absence of the Foreign Secretary.

When these potential influences are discounted, the results of testing the propositions are considerably altered. In fact, the relationship between crisis and decision-making reduces to the point where it is virtually nil.

Support for four of the propositions (numbers 5, 7, 19, and 23) rests upon one piece of evidence: the Cabinet's initial decision to approve the Hoare-Laval Plan. They made this decision because rejecting the proposals would have been tantamount to disowning the Foreign Secretary, because they were deeply reluctant to abandon a sick and absent colleague without giving him a chance to defend himself, and because Hoare's high reputation led them to believe that he was probably privy to some new information as yet unknown in London. This reasoning was dependent upon two of the basic differences between the post-invasion and crisis situations: on the one hand the Foreign Secretary's absence from London, and on the other the fact that he was partly responsible for the peace terms. These two factors and not the

occurrence of a crisis produced these differences in the decision-making process. Thus, support for these four propositions evaporates.

Proposition 10, the apparent rise in importance of group processes during the crisis, is also found suspect. The evidence supporting this proposition hinges upon the Cabinet's implicit demand at their final meeting of the crisis for Hoare's removal from the Cabinet. This demand is also explicable in terms of two of the differences between the post-invasion and crisis situations: a) the Foreign Secretary's being the source of the proposals and thus inseparable from their fate, and b) the backbench revolt and the challenge not to the electoral prospects of the Conservative Party but to Ministers' continued tenure of office. Again one need not appeal to the distinction between crisis and non-crisis to explain the results of testing this proposition.

Proposition 13, the apparent increase in group cohesion, also moves from the supported to the unsupported category. Group cohesion and solidarity during the crisis were of two kinds. In the first stage of the crisis, they revolved around support for the Foreign Secretary. This has already been explained in terms of his absence and his public commitment to the peace proposals by virtue of his announced approval of and responsibility for them. In the second stage of the crisis, group cohesion worked in the opposite direction: the Cabinet closed ranks against the Foreign Secretary and viewed their own survival as the paramount goal. This, of course, must be explained as due to the backbench revolt not the existence of a crisis.

Proposition 14, dealing with the increased importance of the group leader, is also explicable more directly than through resort to the difference in the combination of threat, anticipation, and reaction time. Baldwin's role during the crisis was more important and more immediate a) because in the absence of the Foreign Secretary



he would automatically concern himself with the Foreign Office - especially when, as happened for part of the crisis period, neither Eden nor Vansittart was in the country; and b) because when the survival of the Government was called into question - as it was by the backbench revolt - then it is the Prime Minister's responsibility to become very involved. These two factors, combined with the somewhat tenuous nature of the evidence originally supporting this proposition, mean that it must be regarded as not supported.

Support for Proposition 15, on the decreased importance of bureaucratic politics and departmental autonomy, is also no longer tenable. The autonomy of the Foreign Office (the influence of bureaucratic politics was minimal in the first place and remained unaffected by the crisis) appeared to be marginally greater during the election campaign stage of the post-invasion situation than during the crisis. However, when one takes into account the distractions of the election campaign and the absence of the Foreign Secretary support for this proposition disappears.

For similar reasons, Proposition 16, on the intensification of the search for information, loses its support. Again, virtually all the evidence in favour of it depends upon the election campaign in the post-invasion situation and the absence of the Foreign Secretary during the crisis.

Finally, Proposition 21, the relevance of different goals and values, must also be taken as not supported. The one outstandingly different goal of the crisis period was group cohesion. As has already been indicated, this was dependent upon the identification of the Foreign Secretary with the proposals, his absence from the scene, and the backbench revolt.

At this point, only three propositions remain as supported by the distinction between crisis and non-crisis. Of these, two (number 8 on the disruption of routine and number 12 on the increased frequency of group interaction) are supported by the same piece of evidence: the inordinate and unparalleled number of Cabinet meetings during the crisis. The other supported proposition (number 18) states that during crises information will move with greater speed to the top of the organizational hierarchy. Finally, the first proposition, which yielded mixed results, does indicate that in crises decision-makers will concentrate on the issues of the crisis at the expense of other matters. In sum, the evidence of the case study merely amounts to the claims that in crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making

1. decision-makers will concentrate on the issues of the crisis to the temporary neglect of others;
2. they are likely to meet more often than normally; and
3. the processing of information will be faster.

These results are hardly earth-shattering.

Their immediate implication is to fail to support the one as yet untested proposition. Proposition 25 asserted that 'in crisis as opposed to non-crisis decision-making, the overall quality of decision-making tends to be lower'. If anything, greater concentration, higher frequency of interaction, and better information flow ought to improve the calibre of decision-making during crises. The direct evidence leads to the same conclusion. Certainly, the quality of British decision-making during the crisis was not especially outstanding. The Cabinet's first decision to approve and modify the Plan was probably a mistake; their final decision to reverse themselves and oust the Foreign Secretary might have been sensible at the beginning of the crisis but was equally an error at the end. However, the calibre of decision-making was no better during



the post-invasion situation. The fundamental policy of dualism was a disaster and brought about the crisis in the first place. The occurrence of the crisis cannot be said to have worsened the quality of British decision-making.

In tabular form, the results of testing the propositions can now be summarized as follows:

i) before taking into account the seven differences between the post-invasion and crisis situations:

	<u>supported</u>	<u>mixed results</u>	<u>not supported</u>
cognitive	2	1	4
organizational	6	-	2
analytical	5	-	4
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
TOTAL	13	1	10

ii) after discounting the effects of differences other than the distinction between crisis and non-crisis:

	<u>supported</u>	<u>mixed results</u>	<u>not supported</u>
cognitive	-	1	6
organizational	2	-	6
analytical	1	-	8
quality	-	-	1
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
TOTAL	3	1	21

These final results are extremely disappointing. With a success rate in the propositions of only 12 per cent, only one conclusion is possible: the theory of crisis decision-making as presented here is incorrect and untenable.<sup>1</sup>

Either a different theory is needed or there is no relationship to speak of between the occurrence of international crises and the process of foreign policy decision-making and therefore no theory is possible. Because the theory and propositions used herein are a synthesis and a representative and wide-ranging cross-section of the current work done on crisis decision-making and are based on the standard, commonly used definition of crisis, the first of these alternatives would require a radically different approach to the subject. However, any such theory, even a totally novel one, would probably founder on the same problem as does the one used in this thesis: the attempt to find causal relationships between the structural characteristics of a problem and subsequent human behaviour smacks of mechanism. In the introduction to this work, I noted that efforts to find direct correlations between events in the international system and the foreign policy actions of a state must come to grief on the fact that their inter-relationship is mediated by the process of decision-making. It is not automatic or mechanical. In retrospect, exactly the same criticism can be levelled against attempts to find a causal relationship between the structural characteristics of crises and the decision-making process itself. Thus, the conclusion to which I am somewhat reluctantly but inevitably forced is that no general theory of crisis decision-making is in principle possible. As testing the propositions has indicated, the nature of the process is too dependent upon very specific factors to be explained by a general theory. The accident of Sir Samuel Hoare's breaking his nose had a



more pronounced effect on the decision-making process than did the fact that the Hoare-Laval Plan came as a surprise, posed a severe threat, and demanded an immediate response. No theory can possibly take into account the possibility that the Foreign Secretary might decide to go ice skating and then have a fainting spell while on the rink.

A valid, formal theory of crisis decision-making would prove useful in many ways. Not only would it improve our explanatory capacities, but it would also be of considerable benefit for prediction and hence for the control of future crises. Such a theory, however, appears to be an impossibility. The concept of crisis has much more of a descriptive or an evocative use than an explanatory one. It signifies a turning-point. It does not contribute much to the explanation of the process of decision-making. The overall verdict on a theory of crisis decision-making must echo what Sir Karl Popper once wrote in a somewhat different context:

It almost looks as if historicists were trying to compensate themselves for the loss of an unchanging world by clinging to the faith that change can be foreseen because it is ruled by an unchanging law.<sup>2</sup>

Notes to Chapter Ten

1. Because the propositions were deductively derived from the theory of crisis decision-making, testing them also tests the theory itself. See Chapter One.
2. Karl Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, p. 161.

## EPILOGUE



Historically, the Abyssinian crisis has often been presented as a side-show compared with the main drama of Germany's advance to world conquest. In fact, it was the turning-point of the 'thirties.

- Iain Macleod<sup>1</sup>

What we did in this case is a remarkable ensemble in my judgment. We lost Abyssinia, we lost Austria, we formed the Axis, we made certain of Germany's next war in the speediest and least favourable circumstances; no single member of the League set seriously about rearmament.

- Sir Robert Vansittart<sup>2</sup>

The Hoare-Laval crisis sealed the fate of Ethiopia. Neither Britain nor the League took any further steps of consequence against Italy, and the oil embargo receded into the oblivion of committee hearings. In the spring of 1936, contrary to the expectations and predictions of almost all military experts,<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian resistance collapsed and the Italian army gained an easy victory in the field. In May, Haile Selassie fled into exile in England, and Marshall Badoglio's troops marched triumphantly into Addis Ababa. The British Government soon decided that the continuation of sanctions was futile, and on the 10th of June Neville Chamberlain denounced them as 'the very midsummer of madness'.<sup>4</sup> A month thereafter, despite an impassioned

plea to the Assembly by the Emperor himself, the League of Nations formally voted to end all sanctions. Events closer to home quickly pushed Ethiopia into the background. Already in March, Hitler had remilitarized the Rhineland, and in July the Spanish civil war began. As one European crisis followed another, Italy's colonial adventure in Africa faded from memory.

Within British politics, the affair had no lasting effects. The Government easily defeated Labour's motion of censure, and Baldwin regained his lost prestige with his handling of the Abdication. In return for his survival, he had two promises to honour. He reneged on the first. He told Sir Austen Chamberlain that he was too old for the Foreign Office and would collapse under the strain but that he could enter the Cabinet as Minister without Portfolio with the special task of advising on foreign affairs and defence. Chamberlain was incensed at being denied the post which he felt had been promised to him and which he thought he deserved for his decisive intervention during the debate. He turned down the offer, believing - probably correctly - that the Prime Minister wanted only 'the use of my name to help patch up the damaged prestige of his Government'.<sup>5</sup> To Anthony Eden, Sir Austen was rather more pithy about his conversation with Baldwin: 'He told me I was ga-ga'.<sup>6</sup> Instead, Eden himself went to the Foreign Office. Stanley Baldwin did not break his second promise. In June of 1936, he brought Sir Samuel Hoare back into the Cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty. It was not a universally acclaimed appointment.



Internationally, the Hoare-Laval crisis was a disaster of the first magnitude. Without in any way benefitting Ethiopia or the Ethiopians, it destroyed both the League of Nations and the Stresa Front. It shattered British prestige, confirmed the United States in its isolation, drove Mussolini into alliance with Hitler, and served only to encourage the expansionist greed of Germany.

In retrospect, it is easy to see what the British Government ought to have done. They should have acted with firmness. They should have chosen one half of their double line and then stuck with it. Of the two possibilities available to them, probably the better would have been to have opted for Geneva: not for the sake of the League of Nations, certainly not for the sake of the feudal, slavery-ridden Ethiopian empire, but because such a demonstration of resolution, despite the very limited concrete worth of the League, would have created a very favourable impression in Moscow and Washington and would ultimately have counted for far more against Germany than the Stresa Front and Mussolini's unreliability. However, firmness in either direction, even in support of Italy at the cost of the destruction of the League, would have produced much better results than the indecisive dualism actually pursued. Even after the initialling of the Plan, the Cabinet ought to have remained steadfast. Though they should have followed Neville Chamberlain's advice in the first place and rejected the proposals whatever the cost to the Foreign Secretary, nevertheless, once having accepted the terms, they ought to have stood by their commitment and ridden out the storm. Unfortunately, fortitude and courage were not the foremost qualities of Stanley Baldwin's Cabinet. Instead, they wavered and waffled - with unhappy results for all, ultimately even the Italians. In the

final analysis, the Hoare-Laval crisis and all its consequences stemmed from the Government's inability to act decisively. Throughout the thirties, this failure of will was the tragedy of British foreign policy.

The last few words can be given to the Daily Herald. On the 23rd of December 1935, it said in an editorial that

The basic cause of the troubles of the past few weeks has been - as the Daily Herald has pointed out - that ever since the Abyssinian trouble became acute, the 'National' Government have tried to follow two lines of policy at once.... Only one of those lines could have been followed with honour. Either might have been followed with success.

The attempt to follow both simultaneously has brought nothing but failure and humiliation.



Notes to the Epilogue  
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1. Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain, p. 189.
2. Sir Robert Vansittart, Lessons of My Life, p. 53.
3. For example, in two memoranda at the beginning of 1936, Duff Cooper at the War Office informed his Cabinet colleagues that there was little possibility of a major Italian advance until the following November after the end of the upcoming rainy season. (Cabinet Paper 10(36), 17 January 1936, 'The Italian Situation in East Africa'; and Cabinet Paper 52(36), 24 February 1936, 'The Military Situation in East Africa'.)
4. Not in the House of Commons but to a meeting of a Conservative political club. Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change, p. 455.
5. Sir Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Sir Austen Chamberlain, p. 406. See also, Ian Colvin, Vansittart in Office, p. 84; and Sir Walford Selby, Diplomatic Twilight, p. 54.
6. Anthony Eden, Facing the Dictators, p. 316.

## APPENDICES



Appendix I

Biographical Sketches

After the general election of November of 1935, Stanley Baldwin's new Cabinet consisted of:

Prime Minister	Stanley Baldwin
Lord President of the Council	Ramsay MacDonald
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Neville Chamberlain
Lord Chancellor	Viscount Hailsham
Home Secretary	Sir John Simon
Foreign Secretary	Sir Samuel Hoare
Lord Privy Seal	Viscount Halifax
Secretary for War	Alfred Duff Cooper
Dominions Secretary	Malcolm MacDonald
Secretary for Air	Viscount Swinton
Secretary for India	Marquess of Zetland
Secretary for Scotland	Sir Godfrey Collins
Colonial Secretary	J.H. Thomas
President of the Board of Trade	Walter Runciman
First Lord of the Admiralty	Viscount Monsell
Minister for League of Nations Affairs	Anthony Eden
Minister without Portfolio	Lord Eustace Percy
Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries	Walter Elliot

President of the Board of Education	Oliver Stanley
Minister of Health	Sir Kingsley Wood
Minister of Labour	Ernest Brown
First Commissioner of Works	William Ormsby-Gore

Biographical details for Stanley Baldwin, Sir Samuel Hoare, Anthony Eden, and Sir Robert Vansittart may be found above in the text (pages 126-136). This appendix provides capsule sketches of the rest of the Cabinet as well as of Sir Austen Chamberlain, Geoffrey Dawson, and Sir Maurice Hankey. In addition to the sources listed in the footnotes, I have used the Dictionary of National Biography (DNB) and, for those not covered therein, Who's Who and Who Was Who.

#### Ernest Brown (1881-1962)

Born and educated in Torquay, he worked before the war as a political lecturer. Commissioned in 1916 in the Somerset Light Infantry, he was mentioned in despatches and awarded the military cross and the Italian silver star. He entered the House of Commons in 1923 as a Liberal and subsequently sat with the National Liberals on the Government benches. After serving as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health from 1931 to 1932 and as Secretary to the Mines Department from 1932 to 1935, he joined the Cabinet as Minister of Labour. Brown was a Baptist lay preacher and Brotherhood worker, and the Honourary Treasurer of the Baptist Missionary Society.



Sir Austen Chamberlain (1863-1937)

The elder son of Joseph and half-brother of Neville Chamberlain, he was educated at Rugby and Trinity College Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> After taking his degree, he spent nine months studying in France and twelve in Germany, an experience which left him with a decided preference for things French. He entered Parliament in 1892 and rose quickly to serve as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1903 to 1905. From 1915 to 1917, he was India Secretary, and the following year he became a member without portfolio of the War Cabinet. In 1919, he returned to the Exchequer. Two years later, he replaced Bonar Law as Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the Conservative Party. He remained in that position until the autumn of 1922 when Law and Baldwin destroyed the Coalition and split the Tories at the famous Carlton Club meeting. However, Chamberlain soon became reconciled and in 1924 re-entered the Cabinet as Foreign Secretary in Baldwin's second Government. The Foreign Office was probably his favourite portfolio and certainly the one for which he was best known. His approach was that of a realist, and he had a decidedly limited opinion of the value of the League of Nations. He was a Francophile, pro-Italian, and had amicable personal relations with Mussolini. After the defeat of the Conservatives in 1929, he held office only once more, very briefly, as First Lord of the Admiralty in September of 1931 during the initial days of the National Government. Cosmopolitan and very sociable, Austen Chamberlain in his later years wore the mantle of elder statesman of the Conservative Party. His age, his experience, and his reputation for generosity and honour gave him - as was demonstrated during the Hoare-Laval crisis - great influence within the House of Commons. Birkenhead aptly said of him, 'Austen always played the game and always lost it'.<sup>2</sup>

### Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940)

The second son of Joseph Chamberlain, he was educated at Rugby and Mason College, Birmingham, where he studied science, metallurgy, and engineering.<sup>3</sup> After apprenticing with a firm of chartered accountants, he spent the years from 1890 to 1897, from the ages of 21 to 28, in virtual seclusion in the Bahamas trying to make a success of a sisal plantation his father had bought. Soil conditions doomed this attempt to failure, but it turned him into a strong, self-reliant individual - although it also reinforced his natural shyness. Warm-hearted in private with family and friends, his public image was austere and forbidding. In 1897, he returned to Birmingham to become a prosperous businessman and to take a very active interest in local politics, finally becoming Lord Mayor in 1915. In November of the following year, he had his first taste of national office as Minister of National Service. However, he and Lloyd George immediately developed an intense mutual antipathy, and Chamberlain resigned in August of 1917, not having done well. He entered Parliament a year later and became close friends with Hoare, Halifax, and Swinton. Out of the country during the Carlton Club rebellion, he joined the Cabinet in 1922 as Postmaster General, moved to the Ministry of Health in 1923, and to the Exchequer that August. He returned to Health in Baldwin's second Government and became Chancellor again in the National Government. In these two offices, he was efficient, hard-working (Churchill called him the 'pack horse of the government'<sup>4</sup>), and - within the limits of his financial orthodoxy - did a good job. By 1935, he had firmly established himself as the successor to Stanley Baldwin. In the thirties, Chamberlain was well aware of the necessity for rearmament, and he wrote to his sister: 'On the whole, I loathe Germans'.<sup>5</sup> However, he was not highly knowledgeable in foreign affairs and was decidedly lacking in



flair for them. Domestic matters were his strength. As one of his friends and colleagues put it:

If the world had only allowed him to concentrate his remarkable energy on finance, housing, health, slums, maternal and child welfare, business and industry, local government - and in all of these fields he was a Tory Radical reformer in the tradition of his illustrious father - he would have gone down to history as a successful Prime Minister. These were his first loves, the subjects he really understood, and as Minister of Health and later as Chancellor he was a realistic reformer, competent and efficient.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Boothby, Churchill's crony, despite his extreme antagonism towards the Chamberlain of Munich and appeasement, has nothing but praise for the Chamberlain of the Exchequer.<sup>7</sup>

#### Sir Godfrey Collins (1875-1936)

Born in Glasgow and educated at H.M.S. Britannia, he joined the Royal Navy in 1888 and served as a midshipman in the East Indian Station from 1890 to his retirement three years later. He became a Liberal M.P. in 1910 and a National Liberal in 1931. He was PPS to the War Secretary from 1910 to 1914 and to the Chief Liberal Whip in 1915. For the next two years, he served in Egypt, Gallipoli, and Mesopotamia, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Returning to politics, he became a Junior Lord of the Treasury (1919-1920) and then Chief Liberal Whip (1924-1926). In 1932, he entered the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Scotland. He was also a managing director of the family publishing house, W. Collins of London and Glasgow.

#### Alfred Duff Cooper (1890-1954)

Born into an old, established Norwich family (his father was a successful London surgeon, his mother the daughter of the Duke of Fife), he was educated at Eton and New College Oxford, where he obtained a



second in history. After two years spent mainly in Paris and Hanover, he entered the Foreign Office in 1913. He joined the Grenadier Guards in 1917 and saw action the following year, being mentioned in despatches. In 1919, having returned to the Foreign Office, he married Lady Diana Manners, daughter of the Duke of Rutland and one of the most beautiful women of her day (and supposedly the model for Mrs. Stitch in Evelyn Waugh's Scoop). Elected as a Conservative M.P. in 1924, he lost his seat in 1929 and over the next two years wrote his highly acclaimed biography of Talleyrand. In March of 1931, he ran in the notorious St. George's by-election as Baldwin's surrogate in his clash with the press Lords, Beaverbrook and Rothermere. He won easily and was reappointed to his former position of Financial Secretary to the War Office. Three years later, he was promoted to Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and he entered the Cabinet in November of 1935 as War Secretary. Duff Cooper's political sympathies were very much pro-French and anti-German.<sup>8</sup>

#### Geoffrey Dawson (1874-1944)

The eldest child of a banker named George Robinson, he changed his name to Dawson in 1917 in order to come into an inheritance on his mother's side of the family.<sup>9</sup> He received his education at Eton and Magdalen College Oxford, getting a double first and becoming a fellow of All Souls in 1898. After working in the Post and Colonial Offices, he went to South Africa in 1901 to serve in Milner's famous 'kindergarten' of Tory imperialism. From 1905 to 1910, he edited the Johannesburg Star. He then returned to England, joined The Times, and edited it from 1912 to 1919 and from 1923 to 1941. An intimate of Hoare, quite friendly with Neville Chamberlain, and a confidant of Stanley Baldwin (who valued his advice on foreign affairs<sup>10</sup>), Dawson belonged

to the Cliveden Set and was later closely associated with the policy of appeasement. His opinion, and consequently that of his newspaper, was pro-German. In their memoirs, Hoare, Vansittart, and Macmillan, all complain about this slant, and in the spring of 1935 Eden wrote a memorandum to the Cabinet blasting The Times' defeatist attitude towards Berlin.<sup>11</sup> During the Hoare-Laval crisis, Dawson was all the more incensed because Baldwin, in refusing to see the press, made no exception for him.<sup>12</sup>

#### Walter Elliot (1888-1958)

Born in Lanark, the son of a prominent agriculturist and livestock auctioneer, he was educated at Glasgow Academy and University and took firsts in both science and medicine. During the war, he served in France as a medical officer, winning the military cross and bar. He entered Parliament as a Conservative in 1918 and, though he voted for the Coalition at the Carlton Club, held a number of junior appointments before becoming Financial Secretary to the Treasury in 1931. In 1932, Elliot joined the Cabinet as Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries.

#### Viscount Hailsham (1872-1950)

Douglas Hogg, the eldest son of the philanthropist Quinton Hogg, was educated at Eton and then joined his father's firm of sugar merchants.<sup>13</sup> After serving as a trooper in the Boer War, he was called to the bar in 1902 and succeeded in building a very substantial practice, becoming a bencher in 1920. Two years later, Bonar Law invited him to enter the Government as Attorney General, and he immediately won a by-election to Parliament. He retained this office under Baldwin, who appointed him Lord Chancellor in 1928. That year he became Baron Hailsham, and the following he received his Viscountcy. Upon the



formation of the National Government, he became Secretary of State for War and began to organize and lay the plans for rearmament. Intensely hostile to Germany, he firmly believed that the Berlin government intended war. In 1935, Hailsham once more became Lord Chancellor. A man of sound and careful judgement, he was in Baldwin's inner circle and always ready to help him.

### Viscount Halifax (1881-1959)

Born Edward Wood, fourth son of the second Viscount Halifax, he was heir (his three older brothers all dying before he was nine) to great estates in Yorkshire.<sup>14</sup> He was educated at Eton and Christ Church Oxford, where he took a first in modern history and went on to become a fellow of All Souls. From 1904 to 1905, he travelled around the world. In 1910, he entered Parliament as a Conservative. After serving during the war as a Captain of Dragoons, he returned to politics, took an active part in the Carlton Club conspiracy, and joined Bonar Law's Government as President of the Board of Education. He served under Baldwin both there and as Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. In neither office was he particularly successful, but in 1925 he became Baron Irwin and went to India as Viceroy. He remained there until 1931 and performed creditably. On his return, he declined MacDonald's offer of the Foreign Office but did in 1932 go back to the Board of Education in order to give the Cabinet and Hoare the benefit of his Indian experience. In June of 1935, Halifax (he succeeded to the title in 1934 and became the first Earl in 1944) went to the War Office, and after the general election in November he became Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords. He was one of Baldwin's closest personal friends and one of the few men of Cabinet rank to whom he could unburden himself.<sup>15</sup> As War Secretary, he learned of Britain's weak defences but did not feel



the need for rearmament urgent. His knowledge of foreign affairs was not profound, and he failed to understand, until very late in the day, the intentions and the wickedness of the nazis. Uncompromising in his principles, Halifax's personality and behaviour were dominated by his very staunch and moralistic Anglo-Catholicism. He believed in immortality and had been brought up by his father to consider racing immoral and ballet indecent.

Sir Maurice Hankey (1877-1963)

Hankey (created first Baron in 1939) was educated at Rugby and then joined the Royal Marines, retiring in 1929 with the rank of Colonel. He was appointed Assistant Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1908 and subsequently served as Secretary both to the CID (1912-1938) and to the Cabinet (1916-1938). From 1923 to 1938, he was also Clerk to the Privy Council. With his experience, his intellectual ability, and his position, Hankey exerted enormous influence in Whitehall; in fact, he carried 'a degree of weight in the private councils of the Cabinet greater than that of all but the most determined Cabinet Ministers'.<sup>16</sup> He was Stanley Baldwin's closest adviser on defence,<sup>17</sup> and during the Hoare-Laval crisis his diary records daily meetings with senior Ministers.<sup>18</sup> He opposed sanctions in general on the grounds that either their success or their failure would antagonize Italy,<sup>19</sup> and on 25 November he sent Baldwin a secret memorandum arguing strongly against the specific imposition of the oil embargo.<sup>20</sup> He agreed with Vansittart's belief that this measure risked war with Italy and consequently endangered both the sea route to the East and Anglo-French relations. Hankey also felt certain that France would not support Britain in the event of a Mediterranean war.<sup>21</sup>

Malcolm MacDonald (b. 1901)

The son of Ramsay MacDonald, he was born at Lossiemouth in Morayshire and educated at Bedales School, Petersfield, and Queen's College Oxford. A member of London County Council from 1927 to 1930, he was elected as a Labour M.P. in 1929. Two years later, he followed his father into the National Government and became Parliamentary Undersecretary to the Dominions Office. MacDonald entered the Cabinet in June of 1935 as Colonial Secretary. The following November, he moved to the Dominions Office.<sup>22</sup>

Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937)

The illegitimate son of a farmworker, Anne Ramsay, and a ploughman, Hugh MacDonald, he was born and raised in his maternal grandmother's two-room cottage in the village of Lossiemouth, Morayshire. Self-educated after the age of fifteen, his early years were ones of struggle and poverty. He joined the Fabian Society in 1886 and the Independent Labour Party in 1894. Two years later, he married into the upper middle class and for the first time knew financial independence, managing to travel considerably and to enjoy a very happy family life. In 1906, he was finally elected to Parliament and five years later became chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party. He resigned this position at the beginning of the war over opposition to British entry, but he was not a pacifist and supported the war effort. In 1922 after re-election (he had lost his seat in 1918), he was again chosen chairman of the PLP, and in 1924 he headed Britain's first Labour Government. Prime Minister again in 1929, he continued in that position after 1931 in the Tory-dominated National Government. In June of 1935, his health badly impaired by overwork and overstrain, he switched offices with Baldwin and moved to the sinecure of Lord President of the Council. Though a



supporter of general disarmament and the League of Nations, MacDonald realized the threat to Britain in the thirties and played a significant role in drafting the 1935 White Paper on Defence calling for major rearmament. He had been his own Foreign Secretary in his first Government and possessed a distinct flair for foreign affairs. Lord Eustace Percy, for example, felt that he was probably the only Cabinet member who, in June of 1935, understood the full complexities of the Ethiopian situation.<sup>23</sup> At that time, despite his support for the League, he was concerned with preserving Stresa and took a position intermediate to those of Eden and Hoare.<sup>24</sup>

#### Viscount Monsell (1881-1969)

Born Bolton Monsell (Eyres being his wife's maiden name), he was educated at H.M.S. Britannia and went to sea as a midshipman in 1896. Though retired to the emergency list in 1906, he returned to active duty in 1914 and finished the war with the rank of Commander. He entered the House in 1910 and sat as a Conservative M.P. for 25 years until his elevation to the peerage in 1935. He served as Civil Lord to the Admiralty (1921), Financial Secretary to the Admiralty (1921-1923), Chief Conservative Whip (1923-1931), and Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (1923-1924, 1924-1929, and 1931). He joined the Cabinet in 1931 as First Lord of the Admiralty. In that office, his major concern was not foreign policy but getting more money from the Treasury.<sup>25</sup> In the summer of 1935, worried about the security of the sea route to the East and the importance of the Italian presence on the Brenner, Monsell objected to the imposition of sanctions. He sided with Vansittart's 'realism' and against Eden and the League.<sup>26</sup>



William Ormsby-Gore (1885-1964)

The eldest son of the third Lord Harlech (whom he succeeded in 1938), Ormsby-Gore was educated at Eton and New College Oxford and was elected to Parliament in 1910 as a Conservative.<sup>27</sup> For the first part of the war, he served as an intelligence officer in the Middle East. From 1917 to 1918, he was back in the House acting as PPS to Milner, but in 1918 he returned to Egypt as Assistant Political Officer for Palestine. From 1922 to 1929, with a break for the Labour Government, he held the post of Parliamentary Undersecretary for the Colonies, and in 1931 he was briefly Postmaster General. Later that same year, he entered the Cabinet as First Commissioner of Works. In the summer of 1935, Ormsby-Gore wrote to Baldwin in favour of opposing Mussolini completely.<sup>28</sup>

Lord Eustace Percy (1887-1958)

Lord Eustace Percy (created Baron in 1953), the seventh son of the seventh Duke of Northumberland, was raised in an old-fashioned household dominated by Evangelical Christianity and a tradition of public service. He was educated at Eton and Christ Church Oxford, where he took a first in modern history. Entering the diplomatic service in 1909, he served in Washington from 1910 to 1914, at the Foreign Office during the war, and at the Paris peace conference in 1919. That year he resigned and in 1921 secured election as a Conservative M.P. From 1924 to 1929, he was in the Cabinet as President of the Board of Education; and in 1935 he re-entered that body as Minister without Portfolio. In later years, he came to regret that the Government had not stuck with the Hoare-Laval Plan and ridden out the storm - which he felt was possible - but at the time he

demanded Hoare's resignation.<sup>29</sup> In fact, he was one of the Cabinet members in Eden's camp, pushing for support of the League of Nations even before the Italian invasion.<sup>30</sup>

### Walter Runciman (1870-1949)

Brought up a Methodist, Runciman (created first Viscount in 1937) throughout his life held strong convictions both about his religion and about temperance. After gaining a third in history at Trinity College Cambridge, he joined his father's shipping business and over the years won considerable respect in the City for his economic acumen. Elected to the House as a Liberal in 1899, he entered the Cabinet in 1908 as President of the Board of Education. Three years later he went to Agriculture and Fisheries and in 1914 to the Board of Trade. He resigned from the Government along with Asquith in 1916. From 1931 to 1937, he was back at the Board of Trade, this time as a National Liberal. In foreign affairs, Runciman wanted British participation in Europe limited to air and sea,<sup>31</sup> and in 1935 he sided with Monsell in opposition to any measures possibly leading to the imposition of sanctions against Italy.<sup>32</sup>

### Sir John Simon (1873-1954)

Born in Manchester, the only son of a Congregational Minister, he went to Wadham College Oxford, where he was President of the Union in 1896 and 1897 and was elected a fellow of All Souls. In 1899, he was called to the bar and began a legal career of the utmost brilliance, culminating with his becoming Lord Chancellor in 1940 (as the first Viscount Simon). He entered Parliament as a Liberal in 1906 and joined the Cabinet as Attorney General in 1913. He almost resigned over the Government's decision to go to war and eventually did so eighteen



months later because of conscription. In 1931, he formed and led the National Liberals and re-entered the Cabinet as Foreign Secretary.

In June of 1935, Baldwin moved him to the ~~Foreign~~<sup>Home</sup> Office. Simon was highly intelligent and a superb barrister, but he was personally cold and distant. His great flaw was an inability to make decisions. His tenure at the Foreign Office was, to put it charitably, not a success. He was, as Eden wrote, 'miscast by temperment and training.... too penetrating a discernment and too frail a conviction encouraged confusion where there should have been a fixed intent'.<sup>33</sup> For the Foreign Office, Britain needed an old testament prophet, a righteous crusader, a Churchill - not, for all his intellectual gifts, the equivocal Sir John Simon.

#### Oliver Stanley (1896-1950)

The younger son of the seventeenth Earl of Derby, he was educated at Eton and only prevented by the war from going up to Oxford. He served in France as an officer, winning both the military cross and the croix de guerre. He was called to the bar in 1919 and elected to Parliament as a Conservative five years later. He then joined his uncle's firm of stockbrokers in the City. Appointed Minister of Transport in 1933, he entered the Cabinet as Minister of Labour in 1934 and moved to the Board of Education the following year. Stanley was liked, respected, and trusted by all sides of the House.

#### Viscount Swinton (1884-1972)

The son of Colonel Y.G. Lloyd-Greame, he was educated at Winchester and University College Oxford. Called to the bar in 1908, he served in the army from 1914 to 1917 and was elected as a Conservative M.P. the following year. In 1924, he changed his name to Cunliffe-Lister and in



1935 was created Viscount Swinton (first Earl in 1955). He was one of the principal Carlton Club conspirators and entered Bonar Law's Government as President of the Board of Trade. He held the same office from 1924 to 1929 under Baldwin and in 1931 during MacDonald's first National Government. In November of that year, he went to the Colonial Office and in June of 1935 became Air Secretary, where he played a crucial role in rearming the RAF. Swinton was an excellent administrator and, apart from Baldwin and Chamberlain, the ablest Minister in the Government.<sup>34</sup>

During the Cabinet debates on defence in the spring of 1934, he totally rejected the validity of economic sanctions.<sup>35</sup>

#### J.H. Thomas (1874-1949)

Born at Newport, the illegitimate son of Elizabeth Thomas, a domestic servant, he was brought up in poverty by his grandmother. He left school at twelve and three years later found a job on the Great Western Railway as an engine cleaner. From these beginnings, he embarked on a successful twin career in trade unionism and politics. Thomas was elected to the House of Commons in 1910 and became General Secretary to the National Union of Railwaymen in 1917. He entered the Cabinet in 1924 as Colonial Secretary in MacDonald's first Labour Government. He returned to office in 1929 as Lord Privy Seal and became Dominions Secretary the following year, staying there - having accompanied MacDonald into the National Government - until November of 1935 when Baldwin moved him back to the Colonial Office.<sup>36</sup>

#### Sir Kingsley Wood (1881-1943)

Born in Hull, the eldest child of a Wesleyan minister, and educated at the Central Foundation Boys' School in London, he was articled to a solicitor and admitted in 1903. He then set up practice in the City and

from 1911 to 1919 served on London County Council, involving himself in all aspects of welfare policy. Elected as a Conservative M.P. in 1918, he became PPS the following year to the first Minister of Health. From 1924 to 1929, he was Parliamentary Secretary to Neville Chamberlain in the same Ministry. Appointed Postmaster General in 1931, he entered the Cabinet in that capacity two years later. In 1935, Baldwin chose him as Minister of Health. In October of 1935, Kingsley Wood agreed with Grandi that too much emphasis had been placed on opposition to fascism merely for political purposes.<sup>37</sup>

#### The Marquess of Zetland (1876-1961)

Lawrence John Dundas, second Marquess of Zetland, was educated at Harrow and Trinity College Cambridge. He then travelled extensively throughout the East for a number of years and published several accounts of his experiences and observations. After sitting as a Conservative M.P. from 1907 to 1916, he served as Governor of Bengal from 1917 to 1922 and Secretary of State for India from 1935 to 1940. He succeeded his father in 1929.<sup>38</sup>

Notes to Appendix I  
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1. Sir Charles Petrie, The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Sir Austen Chamberlain.
2. A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945, p. 103n.
3. Keith Feiling, Neville Chamberlain and Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain.
4. Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change, p. 448.
5. Feiling, p. 180.
6. The Earl of Swinton, Sixty Years of Power, p. 110.
7. Robert Boothby, I Fight to Live.
8. Henry Channon, 'Chips': the Diaries of Sir Henry Channon, diary entry for 22 November 1935. Duff Cooper was created Viscount Norwich in 1952. He left one volume of memoirs, Old Men Forget. Diana Cooper wrote three interesting collections of reminiscences, The Rainbow Comes and Goes, The Light of Common Day, and Trumpets from the Steep.
9. J.E. Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times.
10. Sir Robert Vansittart, The Mist Procession, p. 364.
11. Anthony Eden, Facing the Dictators, p. 176.
12. Lord Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, p. 186.
13. See the DNB article by Sir John Simon and R.F.V. Heuston, Lives of the Lord Chancellors.
14. The Earl of Birkenhead, Halifax and A.C. Johnson, Viscount Halifax. Halifax's autobiography, Fulness of Days, contains little of value for British foreign policy during this period.
15. Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin, pp. 497, 536, and 697.
16. D.C. Watt, Personalities and Politics, p. 6.
17. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 316.
18. Available in the Public Record Office in the Hankey Papers, CAB 63/63.
19. Letter to Sir Robert Vansittart, dated 20 November 1935, available in the PRO in the Hankey Papers, CAB 63/50.
20. CAB 63/50.



21. CAB 63/50. In fact, provoked by the comments of Zetland and Duff Cooper at the Cabinet meeting of 18 December that France would not desert Britain, Hankey compiled a lengthy summary of all the evidence to the contrary examined by the Cabinet (available in file CAB 63/50). He sent this as a memorandum to Eden and Baldwin on 26 December 1935. Hankey did not feel, however, that the French would abandon Britain if the threat were from Germany; self-interest and self-preservation would in that situation keep Paris allied to London.
22. Malcolm MacDonald, Titans and Others. Provides some useful background.
23. Lord Eustace Percy, Some Memories, pp. 167-168.
24. Middlemas and Barnes, pp. 833-834.
25. Ibid., p. 844.
26. Ibid., pp. 833-834.
27. See the obituary in The Times, 15 February 1964.
28. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 855.
29. Percy, pp. 170-177.
30. Middlemas and Barnes, pp. 833-834.
31. Eden, p. 96.
32. Middlemas and Barnes, pp. 833-834.
33. Eden, pp. 23 and 220. Simon's memoirs, Retrospect, are of no value for the events of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict.
34. Macmillan, p. 314. Swinton's memoirs, Sixty Years of Power, are very useful for their insights into personalities.
35. Middlemas and Barnes, p. 767.
36. Thomas' autobiography, My Story, contains no useful information on the Italo-Ethiopian conflict.
37. Gaetano Salvemini, Prelude to World War II, p. 353.
38. Lawrence John Dundas, 'Essayez': The Memoirs of Lawrence, Second Marquess of Zetland.

Appendix II

The Hoare-Laval Plan

Appendix III

A Corridor for Camels



On Monday 9 December, the British Government accepted the Hoare-Laval Plan as set out in Cabinet Paper 235(35). In this form, the proposals were presented to Italy and Ethiopia, submitted to the League of Nations, and published in the White Paper.

However, the actual document drawn up in Paris contained one additional clause. Hoare and Laval had agreed to obtain from the Ethiopian government

an undertaking not to construct from the Ethiopian [sic] port which it acquires a railway communicating with the interior and also an undertaking to conclude with the French government all the necessary arrangements to safeguard the interests of the port of Djibuti and of the Franco-Ethiopian railway.<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph had been included both in the copy of the Plan brought by Peterson to Eden on Monday morning and in the original version of Cabinet Paper 235(35) circulated early in the day; but, after having spoken to Vansittart, Eden had deleted it from a subsequent draft handed out in the afternoon. The Cabinet examined and approved this second version. Thus, though aware of the prohibition, they never agreed to it.

On the other hand, they never specifically rejected it. While they probably assumed that the clause was a dead letter, it was not. Following some further telephone calls to Paris, Eden added it, on his own authority, to the telegram sent to Barton on the night of Tuesday 10 December. Eden did not reintroduce this ban into the actual text, but he did advise the British Minister that it would eventually be imposed on Haile Selassie. As a Foreign Office memorandum dated Thursday 12 December noted,

the position is therefore that the paragraph does represent the point agreed to in Paris but that it was not included in the document which the Cabinet had under consideration.<sup>2</sup>

This ambiguity and the problems likely to have been caused by it would undoubtedly have died along with the proposals themselves but for the fact that the Paris correspondent of The Times somehow dug out the details. On Monday 16 December, he reported the existence of this secret agreement, and Dawson accompanied the news story with his biting editorial about a corridor for camels.

This latest development aggravated the Government's already unhappy position. At the Cabinet meetings on Monday night and Tuesday morning (16 and 17 December), Eden explained the situation in detail to his perturbed colleagues: though the ban did appear in the original French draft, Vansittart had later insisted to Léger that it be deleted as it did not form part of the agreement proper; it referred not to Assab but only to Zeila in British Somaliland which the Emperor might prefer. Despite this explanation, Ministers were very upset. Fearing that an already incensed Parliament and public would grow even more angry, they supported the idea of telling both the French government and the House of Commons that no prohibition of any sort had ever been approved. At that moment in Tuesday's discussion, informed that a question would



be asked the following day in the House, they realized that they would have to adopt a policy by then. Feeling, however, that this could not be done without first ensuring that Eden's explanation of the situation was correct and that no documents existed which included Assab in the prohibition, they instructed Baldwin to clarify this point with the Foreign Secretary. The Cabinet felt concerned enough to authorize the Prime Minister to summon another meeting later in the day if necessary. Baldwin, though, wished to avoid inflaming public opinion any further and said that he preferred to deal with the issue at the meeting already scheduled for Wednesday.

After Baldwin had spoken to Hoare, two telegrams were sent from the Foreign Office. The first instructed Barton to disregard the ban on the construction of a railway as it did not 'accurately reproduce the substance of the discussions in Paris'.<sup>3</sup> The second telegram went at two in the afternoon to Clerk.<sup>4</sup> It said that, as the matter was likely to cause great trouble in Britain and as a question was already put down for answer on Wednesday in the House of Commons, he was to inform Laval at once of the British attitude:

The Paris proposals are based on the idea of an exchange of territory, which can only be brought about by an Italian cession of Assab. In regard to that, we have agreed to no restriction of Abyssinia's rights to construct such communications as she sees fit.... [The alternative of Zeila] is hypothetical and does not arise. Only Assab is initially in the picture and there we have... agreed to no untenable restriction.

Accompanying this telegram was a detailed memorandum from Vansittart.<sup>5</sup> He stressed that, while the actual text failed to make it quite clear that only Zeila was covered by the prohibition, there could be no doubt that such was the correct interpretation. He added that at Paris, because all the participants had assumed that both Mussolini and Haile Selassie would reject Assab in favour of Zeila,<sup>6</sup> the British and French



had concentrated on discussing the latter alternative. They had agreed that a connecting railway could be constructed to Djibuti and that a road for lorry traffic could be built directly to Addis Ababa. This road, Vansittart noted, would probably also ruin the French railway, but no one had objected to it. Vansittart emphasized, however, that the ban did not in any way apply to Assab, and he marshalled numerous arguments supporting this contention.

Tuesday evening, Clerk went to see Laval and Léger. The results of this conversation being satisfactory, he returned to the Embassy and began to draw up a telegram to London. However, Léger later rang up with a very different story, and the Ambassador went once more to the Quai d'Orsay for further discussions with him and Saint Quentin (Laval having already left for Geneva). The French now insisted that, while the British could use whatever interpretation they felt was most palatable for Parliamentary consumption, the ban must stand and apply to both Assab and Zeila. Clerk reported (in his despatch finally sent at three o'clock Wednesday morning<sup>7</sup>) that he had used every argument in Vansittart's memorandum as well as others he had thought of but had eventually been forced to state that there existed a clear misunderstanding of fact. The restriction, he had insisted, referred only to Zeila. Clerk ended his telegram with the warning that the French might cause trouble, because none of the documents actually made the point that only Zeila was involved.

When the Cabinet met on Wednesday, they were so preoccupied with their own survival that they virtually ignored the camel corridor. Only at the very end of the meeting did one Minister ask what had happened since the previous day. Baldwin replied that Barton had been told to cancel the information given to him and that Clerk had been instructed to clear the matter up with the French government.

That afternoon during question time in the House of Commons, a Labour member asked whether it had been intended to prohibit the construction of a railway and if so whether this was done with the knowledge of the Foreign Secretary or the consent of the Government. The Prime Minister answered that Sir Samuel Hoare would deal with the matter in his speech on the morrow and asked his questioner to wait until then.

Hoare's explanation, at the beginning of Thursday's debate, was brief. He merely noted that Ethiopia was to have full sovereignty over the port of Assab. There were to be no restrictions. Zeila, he stated, was only included as an alternative if both sides preferred it (of course, he had been sure in Paris that they would, but he refrained from mentioning this). Neither Stanley Baldwin nor Neville Chamberlain, who wound up for the Government, had anything further to say. There was little they could have added, and they undoubtedly felt that the less said the better.

The uproar surrounding the camel corridor died along with the Hoare-Laval Plan itself. The report in The Times had come at a delicate moment: the Government were trying to conduct an orderly retreat in the face of public outrage and backbench rebellion. Revelation of this secret clause served as the last straw. It badly aggravated the Government's position. Its effect, however, was largely catalytic. It speeded up the process but made little difference to the ultimate results.

Notes to Appendix III

1. An unsigned Foreign Office minute, dated Thursday 12 December 1935.  
J 9106/1/1, F.O. 371/19168.
2. Ibid.
3. Quoted from the minutes of Cabinet meeting 56(35), Wednesday  
18 December 1935.
4. J 9521/1/1, F.O. 371/19171.
5. Ibid.
6. The assumption was that Mussolini would prefer Zeila to Assab in  
order to avoid having to cede any Italian territory. Haile Selassie,  
it was felt, would also choose Zeila so that his outlet to the sea  
would be bounded by British and French and not Italian possessions;  
he would be unwilling to put his head into a noose (ibid.).
7. J 9526/1/1, F.O. 371/19171.



Appendix IV

The White Paper on Ethiopia

Baldwin first promised the White Paper during question time in the House of Commons on Tuesday 10 December in an attempt to delay a debate on the Hoare-Laval Plan. Later in the week, when it was settled that the terms would be formally presented to the Secretary General of the League of Nations on the evening of Friday 13 December, it was felt in London that Parliament, public, and press must receive an authoritative version as soon thereafter as possible. Therefore, it was decided to release the White Paper on Saturday morning. The actual contents were determined during Friday. From Geneva, Eden recommended that they consist of the telegrams to Rome and Addis Ababa giving the proposals, the extra telegram to Barton instructing him to ask Haile Selassie not to reject them, and the speeches made by Laval and Eden to the Committee of Eighteen. Peterson passed on these suggestions in a phone call to the Foreign Office; and he agreed, in a second conversation, that the White Paper should begin with the report of the Committee of Five.<sup>1</sup> The Cabinet neither discussed nor approved the White Paper, and they were not consulted on its contents. Baldwin promised it in the first place; then Eden and Foreign Office officials arranged for its contents and its publication.

Note to Appendix IV  
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1. The details are given in a Foreign Office minute dated 13 December 1935. J 9483/1/1, F.O. 371/19171.



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